

# UNEQUALED

There's nobody like Him.

Lesson 4 of 4

## You Need to Downgrade, to Upgrade

### Scope and Sequence

**Doctrine:** God's grace

### Objective

Students will understand that they must make themselves weak (in humility) to receive power in God's grace.

### Memory Verse

**2 Corinthians 12:9**  
What is sufficient for me?

**Worth Repeating:** My weakness is a canvas for God's power.

**HOOK:** I must rely upon God's grace.

As much as we think we have power and strength inside of us, we are going to learn a hard lesson from God's Word. God's Word says that we are weak, that we have very little power, and that we really have nothing to offer. However, there's good news: God is a gracious God. This lesson is about how my weakness is a canvas for God's power.

**LESSON CONTENT:** We will be faced with the reality of our weakness.

- I. We are all weak (vv. 7-8).
  - A. We are all shown our weakness.
  - B. Paul asked God to remove his weakness.
  - C. God allows physical weakness as an example of spiritual weakness.
- II. God's grace is enough (v. 9).
  - A. God's grace is sufficient.
  - B. God's strength is perfected in our weakness.
- III. Make your weakness a canvas.
  - A. Take pleasure in weakness.
  - B. When we are weak, then we are strong.

**CONNECTION:** Let your weakness drive you to God.

- I. Don't be uncomfortable with grace.
- II. Don't worry about appearing weak to others.
- III. Turn your weakness into a masterpiece.

**DECISION:** Embrace my weakness.

Let's choose to embrace our weakness. The easiest way to do that is to stop and pray for God's help in your life every day. We often pray when we are in trouble or when things are going bad and seem out of our control. It's easy to see how weak we are and turn to God.

**Definitions**

**Grace:** Undeserved and unmerited favor.

**Sufficiency:** Having everything you need in God.

**Checklist**

- Have a paper with a child's drawing on it.
- Show "God's Grace" video (3:43 minutes).  
<https://teachersource.wol.org/videos/SBS17/18-1/>
- Show a PowerPoint or a print of a famous painting.
- A power point is available for this lesson.

**Resources**

The New American Commentary: *2 Corinthians* (Vol. 29, p. 524). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

<https://teachersource.wol.org/videos/SBS17/18-2/> : Sermon on 2 Corinthians 12:7-10

**Additional Teacher Resources**

<https://teachersource.wol.org/videos/SBS17/18-1/>

Hook: I must rely upon God's grace.

**Teacher's Note**

We are talking about God's grace. But before we get there I want to ask you a question. Take some time to really think about it before you answer. What are some different ways that we think about strength?

*Allow some time for students to answer. Some possible answers are: a person who is a warrior/soldier, body builder, or football player, or someone who is wise or knowledgeable (smart), rich and influential, strong and athletic, or popular.*

As we start to think about strength, isn't it something we all want? We idolize strength so much that we hate weakness. Maybe that's not something you would want to admit. But think about this: why are professional athletes even popular in our society? What do they have to offer to us besides physical strength and athletic ability? Yet we'll spend huge amounts of time watching them play sports, paying money to see them compete in feats of strength. We even have entire networks devoted to their lives.

Have you ever seen a magazine cover that featured a person with any deficiency? NO! Instead you see people who are perfectly cut, beautiful, and physically perfect. What they put on magazine covers isn't even real! It is photoshopped, airbrushed, and edited to be perfect in every way. We don't like weakness and we worship strength!

Our favorite songs are often about being powerful. There are several songs out there that say, “What doesn’t kill you makes you stronger.” While these songs have a different point, there is a common theme that runs through them and it’s this: “I have strength in myself and I don’t need anyone else.” They are saying I have everything I need inside of myself.

We have shelves of self-help books that all pretty much say the same thing: “You have power and strength inside of you and you don’t need anyone else.” Oprah, a spiritual counselor, says, “You have power inside of you; it’s your birthright.” There’s even a number one selling book called “The Secret” that says all you need to do to get power is ask. Just say things like, “I am a money magnet” and money will start flowing your way. Say, “I am successful and good-looking,” and the universe will obey you, making you successful and good-looking.

Now, some of these examples are extreme, but if we are honest we need to admit that we all secretly like to think of ourselves as strong, powerful, and self-sufficient. We don’t like to think of ourselves as weak and pitiful. That’s one of the reasons bullying hurts so much—we don’t want to be weak!

As much as we think we have power and strength inside of us, we are going to learn a hard lesson from God’s Word. God’s Word says that we are weak, that we have very little power, and that we really have nothing to offer. However, there’s good news: God is a gracious God. This lesson is about how my weakness is a canvas for God’s power. Think of the power of an artist, how they can take a canvas and turn it into an awe-inspiring painting, a masterpiece that captures the attention of the viewers. That is what God wants to do with your weakness.

**Lesson Content: We will be faced with the reality of our weakness.**

Maybe you are skeptical about all of this. Are you sitting there saying, “Look, I know I am strong. I’ve accomplished a lot; I’ve lived through a lot; I am strong”? Here’s the first truth we will see in our Scripture passage. At some point in our lives we will be faced with the reality of our weakness.

- I. We are all **weak** (vv. 7-8).  
Can I have a volunteer read 2 Corinthians 12:7-10?

*Choose a student to read the entire passage. Then repeat verses 7 and 8 as the first point focuses on these two verses. Feel free to gather a volunteer ahead of time for this.*

- A. We are all shown our weakness.  
This is the Apostle Paul speaking here. He had been serving God and God had given him some incredible visions and allowed him to write huge portions of God’s Word. God didn’t want Paul to become prideful, He gave Paul something called a “thorn in the flesh.” Paul doesn’t say what it was, but that it was a physical problem that he had to live with every day of his life. He calls it a “messenger of Satan to buffet me.” This physical problem was so bad that it hindered him.

**Teacher’s Note**

Paul was a man who really loved God. He had been serving God, writing the Bible, and starting churches all around Asia. Yet there was a point in his life when his body began to break down and rebel against him. Paul was faced with this truth: he was weak. He wanted to think of himself as a strong and useful tool for God, but instead he had to live with a major problem on a daily basis. *Every day* he was reminded of how weak he was.

At this point in your life that's probably hard for you to relate. You are young, you can stay up all night, eat tons of junk food, and still go out the next day and run a marathon or play a football game and feel great. There will come a day, sooner or later, when life will force you to confront this reality: you are weak. Your body will start to break down, either from illness or from just getting old.

Maybe you'll get a significant injury while playing a sport, or you'll find it harder to stay up late and remember things. But it happens to everyone. The only question is, *when* it happens, what will be your response?

B. Paul asked God to remove his weakness.

Let's look at Paul's first response. In verse 8 he says, "I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me." Even Paul, an Apostle and godly man, had the same response we all would have. He says, "God take this away from me!" He wanted God to take it away so badly that he asked three different times. Why do we respond this way when we are confronted with our weakness?

Because we love strength and we hate weakness. We want to think of ourselves as invincible, powerful, and strong. The easiest solution we can see to the problem of weakness is to pretend it's not there—to act like we aren't weak and ignore the problem.

The truth is, God allows weakness for a reason! Remember our truth: my weakness is a canvas for God's power.

C. God allows physical weakness as an example of spiritual weakness.

God controls all things and has a plan for everything that happens in our lives. In His plan, He allows our physical weakness and sickness to show us something very important. God wants us to see that our *physical* weakness is an example of our *spiritual* weakness. Paul had just experienced a serious physical problem in his body. God was using that physical problem with his body to show Paul that he also had a spiritual problem.

It's important to remember that being physically weak is not a sin. Being sick, injured, or physically impaired does not mean you committed a sin. It does reveal a need—that we are inadequate and need strength from outside of ourselves. It is the same spiritually. We are spiritually sick, hurt, and disabled.

Romans 3:10-18 describes us in very unflattering terms.

*Have a student read Romans 3:10-18.*

## Teacher's Note

This passage describes the reality of who we are spiritually: our throats are an open tomb, we deliver poison with our words, our feet are swift to shed blood, and none of us seek after God, not even one. It is vital that we see our true weakness. We might be strong on the outside, but on the inside, we are all spiritually weak.

Before you can accept your weakness and turn it into a canvas, you first need to acknowledge the truth. We are all spiritually weak and God uses our physical weakness to show us our spiritual weakness. That spiritual weakness is what must drive us to God and His strength and power.

II. God's **grace** is enough (v. 9).

Let's look at the next verse in our passage to see how God answers Paul. Let's read 2 Corinthians 12:9 together.

*Read verse 9 again.*

A. God's grace is **sufficient**.

Let's break Christ's response down into two parts. First, He says, "My grace is sufficient for you." Let's first talk about God's grace. Receiving grace means *undeserved and unmerited favor* or getting something that you don't deserve. Grace is a gift. When you receive Christmas presents your parents don't hand you a bill for them. When you think about it, why do we even get gifts on Christmas? It is not because we worked hard and earned them, but because people love us and give us something we didn't earn. That is the same with God's grace. He loves us so much that He wants to give us something to help us. The second word in this phrase is the word *sufficient*.

Sufficiency is a word that means *you have everything you need*. It means you couldn't possibly take anything else because you are so full. It's like how you feel after you've just eaten a Thanksgiving Day feast. You are so full that if someone offers you food you say, "No thanks" because you have all you need. That is sufficiency. It means because of God's grace you don't need anything else.

Paul is crying out to God in his weakness and Jesus responds with, "It doesn't matter that you are weak because I have given you everything you need." Peter tells us that through His power, God's grace has given us "all things for life and godliness" (2 Peter 1:3). That is essentially a blank check. God writes a massive check and says, "Here you go." In His grace, God provides for us everything we could ever need. But what do I really need?

Grace tells us that we don't really need the things that we think we need. If we needed those things, then God would have given them to us! Paul in effect says to Jesus, "I need to be strong again. I need to have this physical problem removed." Jesus answers, "No, you don't need me to remove that; you need Me. Let Me be your strength. You received this problem to remind you that you need Me."

B. God's strength is **perfected** in our weakness.

Let's look at the other response that Jesus gives to Paul. He says, "My strength is made perfect in weakness." Another way to translate that phrase is, "My power is complete in weakness." Now remember Who is talking here because we are about to find out how my weakness is a canvas for God's power. Jesus is the one speaking here. He is God and has infinite power to do anything that He wants to do. How can God's power be complete in our weakness?

Check out this video that shows how God's grace overcomes their sins and makes something beautiful.

**Teacher's  
Note**

Show "God's Grace" video 3:43 minutes

<https://teachersource.wol.org/videos/SBS17/18-1/>

Paul got it! He said, I'm not just going to ignore my weakness or minimize it. I am going to boast about it! Because then I can have more of Christ's power in my life. Is there a sin you can't overcome? Is there a situation that seems impossible to resolve? Acknowledge that you are weak and God's power will help you overcome your sin. It will teach you how to resolve that situation. Are you facing a hard time that seems impossible? Turn your weakness into a canvas by asking God for His power in your life. His power is the brush, and your weakness becomes a canvas that allows Him to paint a masterpiece of God's grace.

III. Make your weakness a canvas.

Read verse 10 with me.

**Teacher's  
Note**

Read verse 10.

A. Take **pleasure** in weakness.

In this verse, Paul takes things a step further. Once he understands that he can gain God's power through His weakness, he says he will boast in his weakness. He says, "Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities." Paul has completely reversed how he feels about weakness. He used to hate it. He wanted Jesus to remove it from his life completely so he didn't have it. But now he says, I take pleasure in it. He says, "My weakness brings joy to my life because I know God's power isn't far behind."

I want you to notice the five types of weakness he lists here.

- **Infirmities**

First is infirmity. That is the same word that Paul used above and it normally refers to physical weakness or illness. It's when your body starts to break down from age, or you get cancer, or you are severely injured for some reason. It can even refer to a common cold or getting the flu.

- **Reproaches**

Second, is "reproaches." That is when people mistreat you for whatever reason. It's when life isn't fair, when people hate you or are against you because they just don't like you.

- **Needs**  
Next is “needs.” This refers to a realization that we need to eat, sleep, and have shelter. There is only one person who has no needs and that is God. One of the ways our weakness is shown is that our needs must be met. We must eat and sleep. These are some of the ways God shows us that we are weak and He is strong. He doesn’t need to eat, and He doesn’t need to sleep or rest.
- **Persecutions**  
The next weakness is persecutions.” Persecutions are similar to reproaches in that people are out to get you and mistreat you. However, in this case it’s because you are a follower of Jesus. This word refers to having hard times simply because you are a follower of Jesus, where a “reproach” is more general.
- **Distresses**  
The next word is the word “distresses.” It’s a general term referring to all types of calamity or natural disasters that can happen to a person.

Now that we’ve talked through what these individual words mean, take a second to think about what Paul is really saying. He is saying, “I will rejoice when these things happen to me.” Can you have joy when you have an illness? Could you have joy when your life isn’t fair and people are against you? Would you have joy when you realize you have real needs? Can you have joy when people persecute you for following Jesus? Could you have joy if your house is destroyed by an earthquake? Paul says he can take pleasure in those things because that means he will have more of God’s power in His life, because they give him the opportunity to depend more upon God.

B. When we are weak, then we are **strong**.

Look at the final phrase in our passage here. Paul says, “For when I am weak, then I am strong.” I want you to imagine your life as a blank canvas. It’s just begging to be painted into a beautiful work of art, something that people will look at for centuries to come and say, “What a beautiful masterpiece!” But we are like a toddler with a set of paints slapping colors all over the canvas. Its haphazard, the proportions are all wrong, and we forget half-way through what we were painting.

Instead, God comes along and says, “Let me have the brush.” He takes the brush and, as any master artist can, makes each line crisp. The color palette is perfect, the scene looks real, and the painting is a masterpiece. When we try to paint on the canvas of our life it will always turn out looking like this.

**Teacher’s Note**

*Show a picture painted or drawn by a small child. Then show a picture of a work of art. Another option is to have a student come forward and draw something with stick figures.*

But when God paints on our lives it can look like this. But there’s a key thing to remember here: God won’t take the brush from us. He asks for us to give it to Him. Will you give the brush of your life to God and let Him paint a masterpiece? My weakness is a canvas for God’s power. That means if you realize that you can’t paint, you let Him do it because you know He is the best at it! But there are three things to watch out for as we close.

**Connection: Let your weakness drive you to God.**

## Teacher's Note

### I. Don't be **uncomfortable** with grace.

First, don't be uncomfortable with grace. Many people don't like grace because they don't earn it. Do you want to work hard and earn it yourself? Sorry, that can't happen. Let's read James 4:6 together.

*Read James 4:6.*

You see *divine power and human power are always at odds*. If everything is about how hard you have worked, then you get the credit and you get the glory. God will never share His glory because He is the only one who is worthy of the glory (Isaiah 48:11). He will oppose you for your pride in thinking you have something to offer.

When God opposes you it means He will withhold His power in your life. He will hold you at a distance. If you want to, God will let you do things in your own strength and won't help you. How can you know if God is opposing you?

Has the joy of the Lord seemed to dissipate in your life? Do you find it difficult to focus in prayer and Bible reading? These are indicators of God opposing you. Another indicator is when you notice that the way you serve others becomes more of a drain on you than a source of life. When you serve others in God's power, it produces joy and life. When you try things in your own strength, it is burdensome and hard.

When you choose to humble yourself, which means you recognize that you are weak and have nothing to offer, then God shows up and gives you His grace. That means He provides for all your needs and gives His power. My weakness is a canvas for God's power. The more you rely on God the more He gives you His power.

### II. Don't worry about **appearing** weak to others.

Second, don't worry about appearing weak to others. The world is trained to see strength in a certain way. We talked about it at the beginning of the lesson. The world sees strength as wisdom, smarts, beauty, riches, popularity, and influence. That's one of the reasons people like to brag so much. They want to draw attention to their strength. When you choose to focus on your weakness and embrace it like Paul did, others will start to see you as weak instead of strong.

They won't be able to see your strength because your strength isn't how attractive you are. It won't be in how smart you are or about your wealth. Your strength comes from God and that's something that others *can't* see. If they can't see it they will treat you as if you are weak. That's why it's important to stop worrying about how others see you. Build your life and your comfort on God's strength. Build your happiness on His power. You can rest easy because you know that "when I am weak, then I am strong."

Remember there was once a person who was the strongest of all but appeared weak. That was Jesus. He was born like every baby. There was nothing about Him that made Him stand out from the crowd. Jesus even let Himself be tortured, beaten, crucified and died on a cross. He showed weakness for you so you could have His power in your life. People looked at Him and mocked Him for His weakness yet He could have called a million angels to destroy the world. He chose instead to be humble and appear weak for our sake.



Paul faced this same problem. In the book of 2 Corinthians he had to defend himself from some false teachers who were calling him weak. They were asking people in the church if they wanted to follow an old guy with physical problems. Instead of bragging about how strong he was, Paul said, "You're right, I am weak, but my strength comes from God." Paul turned his weakness into His canvas because his power came from God.

III. Turn your weakness into a **masterpiece**.

In John 15:5 Jesus said, "Apart from me you can do nothing." He didn't say, "Apart from me you can do a little." Or "Apart from me you will sometimes fail." He said, "Apart from me you can do nothing!"

Remember, my weakness is a canvas for God's power. There's only one way to do that; embrace your weakness. Don't try to hide it, minimize it, or pretend it doesn't exist. Don't wallow or spend all your time crying about how weak you are and how your life is so bad. You should not hate other people for not being as weak as you. When you compare yourself to God you realize that you are NOTHING and that everyone else is NOTHING.

Let your weakness drive you to humble yourself before God and say, "God, I need You! I need Your power in my life because I can't do anything to change my circumstances. I can't change my sin or my life. I need YOU!" That is something that God will hear. That is what it looks like to embrace your weakness and turn it into a beautiful painting.

**Decision: Embrace my weakness.**

Let's choose to embrace our weakness. The easiest way to do that is to stop and pray for God's help in your life every day. We often pray when we are in trouble or when things are going bad and seem out of our control. It's easy to see how weak we are and turn to God. But what about when things are going well?

The key here is to *always* realize that you are weak. You need to choose to embrace your weakness and let God's grace turn it into a masterpiece. So as a basic first step for this week, start your day by asking for God's help in everything that you'll face that day. Prayer is one of the key ways we show our dependence on God. Every day, say a simple prayer committing to live by the strength of God. Write down this prayer as a reminder of what to pray. "Jesus, I realize I am weak. I realize that I have nothing to offer and You provide everything I need. Help me today to live with Your power in my life. Amen." That is a prayer that will turn your weakness into a canvas. Remember that this is a sample prayer; there is no perfect formula or magic words. You need to choose to surrender to God and rely on His strength.

