

Grace is >

Life Group Leaders Guide

Objective

This guide contains the information and questions you will need to lead a life group study during our current sermon series. Our aim is to spark Spirit-led, Bible-centered conversations that anyone can participate in regardless of how biblically literate they may or may not be. **The win** that we want you to experience is when your group members **connect** more closely with each other and with God so that they are encouraged to move forward in living out their faith.

Directions

The *Purpose* and *Move* sections are for the leader to read to the group to provide clarity. **Do not feel pressured to cover all the questions.** Decide which ones may work best for your group. You will see brief notes interspersed between groups of questions to help give the group context for their answers. The *Notes and Commentary* section (when included) is optional reading for the leader to get background information and better understanding of the passages before leading the discussion.

Series Overview

Our default in life is to define ourselves by our mistakes, hurts, weaknesses and circumstances. As followers of Jesus, these things are a part of our story, but they don't define us. The grace of God does.

Grace is > Series Schedule

Week	Sermon Date	Topic of sermon and life group
1	8/12/18	Grace is > Mistakes
2	8/19/18	Grace is > Hurts
3	8/26/18	Grace is > Weaknesses
4	9/2/18	Grace is > Circumstances (no LG study--socials)

The Point Church Life Group Curriculum

Grace is > Weaknesses

Purpose of Study

When we're weak, God is strong. In fact, that is often when we experience God at his strongest. God's grace meets us even at our weakest point and shows us that Grace > Weaknesses.

Flow of Study

Icebreaker: If you were interviewing for your dream job and the hiring manager asked: "What is your biggest weakness?" what would you say?

Move #1: Let's begin by unpacking any thoughts that you took away from this weekend's sermon.

1. Did anything stand out to you from the message this weekend? Any insights or questions?
2. Did you feel convicted to act on something from the message?

Move #2: Next we'll dive deeper into the main passage from the sermon. The Apostle Paul gives reasons why he could boast in his strengths but instead highlights the way God works in his weakness.

Read 2 Corinthians 11:21-23 (NIV)

Leaders Note: You might explain that the Apostle Paul, in this letter, is combatting some false teachers who had infiltrated the Corinthian church and were trying to set themselves up as being more worthy leaders than Paul. At this point, Christianity was still strongly tied to the Jewish community.

...Whatever anyone else dares to boast about—I am speaking as a fool—I also dare to boast about. 22 Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they Abraham's descendants? So am I. 23 Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again.

1. What stands out to you from this passage?
2. Do you take pride in the kinds of things Paul "dares to boast about" (ethnicity, nationality, lineage, religion, service, sacrifice, bravery, etc.)? If so, which? If not, what kinds of things do you boast about?
3. In our culture that values awards and credentials, why might boasting about our strengths actually be foolish?

Read 2 Corinthians 12:6-10 (NIV)

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, 7 or because of these surpassingly great revelations. Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given 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.

4. What stands out to you from this passage?
5. Do you ever feel like God’s grace isn’t sufficient for you because of your weaknesses? How can we overcome this fear?
6. How do you understand the idea that Christ’s power is “made perfect in weakness”? What examples have you seen in the lives of others? [Note: You’ll ask about their own lives in question 12.]
7. What weaknesses or insults have you endured for Christ’s sake?

Leader Note: When Paul uses the phrase “thorn in the flesh,” he most likely refers to a physical illness or disability (see commentary below for more information), though the application is broader.

8. What’s an example of when you prayed for God to remove some point of weakness or limitation that you felt was holding you back? What happened?
9. Why might God decide not to remove our weaknesses?
10. How might we rely on God in the midst of our weakness?
11. How does being open about our struggles and weakness, and sharing how God has shown up in the middle of them, point people to Christ?
12. What do you think Paul means when he says “For when I am weak, then I am strong”? How have you experienced this in your own life?

Next Steps:

- Pray for God to reveal how he wants to use your weaknesses to do good things in you and through you.
- Discuss plans for next week’s social and encourage everyone to invite someone new!

Prayer: End your study with a time of praying with and for each other. Take requests, but be sure to pray also about what you’ve discussed today.

Notes and Commentary

The following are pieces of commentary, facts, and links based on the passages of this study in order. Use them optionally to help supplement your personal preparation.

On 2 Corinthians 11:21-23:

Indeed, 11:17 indicates that Paul is well aware that his boast will be that of a fool, since it will not be the kind of boasting that honors the Lord by exalting in his grace and gifts. In Paul's words, it will not be talking "according to the Lord" (niv, "as the Lord would"), that is, in accordance with who the Lord is (cf. 1:14; 10:17–18; Rom. 5:11; 15:17–18; 1 Cor. 1:26–31; Gal. 6:14; Phil. 3:3; 1 Thess. 2:19). Instead, the foolish boast takes pride in its own distinctives, spiritual endowments, and/or leaders, as if these were not all gifts from God (cf. 1 Cor. 3:3; 4:5–7). As a result, the boast that is "according to the Lord" is the opposite of boasting that is "according to the flesh" (niv, "the way the world does"). Such boasting is rooted in the world's values, devoid of the Spirit. Nevertheless, Paul feels compelled to conform to such boasting for the sake of winning back the Corinthians, since they are gladly bearing with Paul's opponents, the real fools (11:18–19a). This description in 11:18 of the boasting to come as being done "according to the flesh" indicates that the "fool's speech" cannot be extended to include all of 11:21–33, but must be limited to 11:21b–23b (i.e., his "little boasting," 11:16). It is difficult to imagine that Paul would characterize his extended boasting in his weakness as "fleshly" or "worldly," since it is precisely his suffering through which the power and glory of Christ are made known in the Spirit (cf. the thesis statements in 2:14; 3:2–3; 12:5, 9–10)....

Paul's boasting in his weakness is the main point and central theme of this section. There have been two predominant interpretations of this theme in Paul's letters: (1) the psychological interpretation, associated with the work of C. H. Dodd, in which Paul's boasting is part of his own struggle for recognition, and (2) the theological interpretation, associated with Rudolf Bultmann, in which Paul's boasting indicates the basis of the believer's confidence before God. Paul's argument in 11:1–12:13 clearly involves both dynamics, since the nature of one's boasting before others, rightly or wrongly, reflects the nature of one's relationship with God. Paul boasts because his legitimacy as an apostle is being attacked, but the nature of his boast is determined by his understanding of the way in which God commends his servants (cf. 10:12–18).

On 2 Corinthians 12:6-10:

Because of the great magnitude of his revelations, Paul knew that to boast in his visions, as his opponents were doing, would lead to exalting himself in a way that would cut out the very heart of the gospel. So, rather than causing him to trumpet his visions aloud, the fact that his revelations were "surpassingly great" kept him from boasting in them, both for his own sake (cf. 12:5) and that of others (cf. Col. 2:18).

Paul's restraint, however, was not the result of his own moral willpower. In 12:7b, he makes it clear that God kept him from such conceit by granting him "a thorn in [or against] his flesh," that is, "a messenger of Satan" sent to batter or torment him. Once again, Paul uses the divine passive in this verse: "There was given me [by God] a thorn in my flesh." Both Paul's rapture and his thorn are the work of God. As Ralph Martin observes, "The importance of the passive verb, *edothē*, 'was given,' can hardly be exaggerated. God is the unseen agent behind the bitter experience." Paul's use of the divine passive in regard to his receiving this "messenger" as well as for his rapture into heaven may be intended to correct the accusation of his opponents that his "thorn" was the work of Satan alone, not of God. From their perspective, Paul's inability to overcome it thereby called his legitimacy into question.

The exact nature of this "thorn" or satanic messenger has been a matter of much debate. Nonetheless, Ulrich Heckel has convincingly demonstrated that Paul's "thorn in the flesh" in 12:7 and the parallel reference to his "weakness" (*astheneia*) in 12:9 are best taken to refer to some personal sickness.

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At first, Paul reacted to his "thorn in the flesh" as would be expected from one who knew of God's sovereignty over evil and of God's love for his children: He prayed that the Lord would remove the "thorn" (12:8). Paul is no Stoic, who sees the thorn as an opportunity for self-mastery and endurance. Nor is he a theological masochist, who glorifies suffering itself. When suffering hits, Paul prays for deliverance.

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Paul's sufferings can never outstrip God's supply of grace (cf. 1:8–11). For this reason, he will "all the more gladly" boast in his weaknesses instead of his revelations, in order that the power of Christ may dwell on him (v. 9b; cf. 1:9–10; 11:30; 12:5). The promise of God's grace and power leads Paul to be pleased in his sufferings (v. 10a) rather than continuing to pray for their removal, because he now knows that "when" he is weak, "then" he is strong (v. 10b). Thus, the revelation of Christ's power in Paul's weakness (v. 9b) and Paul's consequent contentment (v. 10a) form the high point of his argument in this passage and, in doing so, provide a summary of the theological substructure of 2 Corinthians as a whole.

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In stark contrast, when Paul boasts in his weakness, he is not engaging either in the self-mastery of the ancient Stoic or in the reinterpretation of events that is common to the modern "power-of-positive-thinking" movement. For Paul, weakness is not the result of failing to control our passions or being unable to fight negative thoughts or influences. Weakness for Paul is a real suffering and powerlessness because of our existence under the real power and circumstances of sin. The Self cannot subdue sin on its own. Weaknesses cannot be escaped simply by thinking differently. What is needed is not more willpower, but the power of God's grace. When confronted with his thorn in the flesh, Paul does not try to think positively; he prays. His contentment does not come from a renewed ability to exercise his will but from receiving God's grace. He is not seeking a higher virtue of contentment but a supernatural act of deliverance.

(Scott Hafemann, *NIV Application Commentary - 2 Corinthians*)