

The Weak Church: Prayer, Weakness, and the Tabernaciling of God

*"He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the **weak**." Isaiah 40:29*

*"Even as Christ accomplished atonement for us by his suffering and death, so the Lord accomplishes witness to the world through our weakness. In fact, God has more need of our weakness than of our strength."
MARVA J. DAWN, "POWERS, WEAKNESS, AND THE TABERNACLING OF GOD"*

Images of Weakness in the Life of Israel

1. God's Unlikely Dwelling: The Shekinah Glory in a Tent

*"I have not **dwelt** in a house from the day I brought the Israelites up out of Egypt to this day. I have been moving from place to place with a **tent** as my dwelling." II Samuel 7:6*

*"The Shekinah is not a divine attribute. It is the presence of God himself. But it is not God in his essential omnipresence. It is his special, willed and promised presence in the world—the idea of the Shekinah originally meant God's tabernacle, tent or dwelling among his people and that God can humiliate and lower himself, be with his people, and identify himself with his people's fate."
JURGEN MOLTMANN, "THE SPIRIT OF LIFE"*

2. God's Unlikely Choices: Israel was the Fewest, Jacob was Second, Gideon the Weakest

*"The LORD did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the **fewest** of all peoples." Deuteronomy 7:7 (Ps. 105:12)*

Israel's Story: God's Glory Manifested in Israel's Weakness Gave Glory to God

*"The Lord said to Gideon, 'You have **too many men** for me to deliver Midian into their hands.'" Jdg. 7:2*

3. God's Unlikely Strategy for Victory: March, Shout or Just have a Prayer Meeting

God's direction to Israel was a strange strategy for victory: Wait.

*"Since ancient times no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who acts on behalf of those who **wait** for him." Isaiah 64:4*

Israel discovered that God was drawn to their weak, vulnerable, desperate cries: II Chronicles 7:14

*"What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way our God is **near us** whenever **we pray** to him." Deuteronomy 4:7*

Israel at Mizpah Discovered What One Real Prayer Meeting Can Do: From Ichabod to Ebenezer

*"Then Samuel said, 'Assemble all Israel at Mizpah and I will **intercede** with the Lord for you.'" I Sam. 7:5*

A Perfect Image of Weakness: A Valley of Dry Bones—Ezekiel 37

Images of Weakness in the Life of Jesus

"He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him." Isaiah 53:2

1. Jesus' Unlikely Dwelling: The Word Became Flesh and Tabernacled Among Us

*"The Word became flesh and made his **dwelling** (tabernacle) among us. We have seen his glory..." Jn. 1:14*

"The choice of 'flesh' to describe his dwelling among us, like the choice of the verb 'to dwell in a tent,' does not mean simply that God became tangible. It means God became weak, undignified and vulnerable." JOHN HOWARD YODER

2. Jesus' Unlikely Choices: Blessed are the Poor, Hungry, Broken and Meek

"Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." Lk. 18:17

3. Jesus' Unlikely Strategy for Victory: Pray like Midnight Friends with No Food and Widows with No Rights

Jesus taught his Disciples that **Importune Prayer** (Luke 11) is the key to the Kingdom and the Tabernacled of the Spirit and that **Persistent Prayer** (Luke 18) is the Way of Justice and Faith

*"The sense of impotence is the soul of intercession."
"Blessed is the man who has made that 'I have nothing' the motto of his ministry."
ANDREW MURRAY, "THE MINISTRY OF INTERCESSION"*

The Perfect Image of Weakness: Jesus Crucified in Weakness and Raised by the Power of God

"For, to be sure, he was crucified in weakness, yet he lives by God's power." 2 Corinthians 13:3-5

"Christ disarmed the principalities by submitting to them. He took away their power by not responding with power." MARVA DAWN, "THE UNNECESSARY PASTOR"

Images of Weakness in the New Testament Church

*"I have given them the **glory** that you have given me, that they may be one as we are one." John 17:22*

1. The Spirit's Unlikely Dwelling: The Spirit of Glory in the Church

*"And in him you too are being built together to become a **dwelling** in which God lives by his Spirit." Eph. 2:22*

2. The Spirit's Unlikely Choices: The Weak Things of the World

*"God chose the **weak** things of the world to shame the strong." 1 Corinthians 1:26-27*

A Different Reading of 2 Corinthians 12:9

"But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for [your] power is ended [teleo] in weakness." Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may tabernacle [episkeno] upon me." 2 Corinthians 12:8-10

*"Paul's power is brought to its end in his weakness; consequently, Paul glorifies in his weakness because through its very existence Christ is able to reveal his presence with him (Christ's power tabernacles on him) in a unique way."
MARVA DAWN, "POWERS, WEAKNESS, AND THE TABERNACLING OF GOD"*

3. The Spirit's Unlikely Strategy: Weak Prayers 'Helped' by the Spirit's Groans

*"In the same way, **the Spirit helps** us in our **weakness**. We do not know what we ought to **pray** for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express." Romans 8:26*

*"The sign the Holy Spirit is in us is that we realize that we are empty, not that we are full."
O. CHAMBERS, "IF YOU WILL ASK"*

In the Early Church, corporate waiting and praying was the key to every spirit outpouring:

*"After **they prayed**, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were **all filled** with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly." Acts 4:31*

Pentecost as the Perfect Image of Weakness: A small band of fearful and weak disciples gathered in a room in Jerusalem desperately **waiting** and **praying** for the Spirit of Jesus to tabernacle on and in them (Jn. 20:19; Acts 1:14)

Rehabilitating “Weakness” in the Church: “We are Weak in Him”

*“Likewise, we are **weak** in him, yet by God’s power we will live with him to serve you.” 2 Cor. 13:4*

“There is something seriously wrong with our lives and churches if we are operating out of strength, rather than weakness in which God tabernacles.” MARVA DAWN

Today “weakness” is used as a term of derision, the explanation for failure, and something to be overcome.

1. Redefining Leadership: The *Weak* Leader Yoked to Jesus

*“Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am **gentle** and **humble** in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” Matthew 11:29*

“Jesus did many miracles, but His crown of glory was not the miracles, but His gentleness, tenderness, and humility.” P. F. BRESEE

Apostolic leadership in the early church sought to model Jesus’ leadership yoke of meekness and humility:

“By the meekness and gentleness of Christ, I appeal to you.” II Corinthians 10:1

“Humility recedes as leadership advances.” EUGENE PETERSON, “THE UNNECESSARY PASTOR”

2. Redefining the Pastor’s Role: Prayer Leader

The Acts 6 Crisis of Leadership: “The sentence that saved the church” – Maria Durso

*“We will devote our attention to **prayer** and the ministry of the **word**.” vs. 4*

“Prayer leaders are scarce. Prayer conduct is not counted as the highest qualification for offices in the church. We cannot wonder that so little is accomplished in the great work in the world which God has in hand.” E. M. BOUNDS, “THE ESSENTIALS OF PRAYER”

3. Redefining Success: Patience Rather than Effectiveness

“The key to the obedience of God’s people is not their effectiveness, but their patience.” JOHN HOWARD YODER, “THE POLITICS OF JESUS”

A “Success” Word in the New Testament: *hypomone*, *persevere*

The specific kind of faith mentioned in *Hebrews 11* is revealed by the bookend exhortations in *Hebrews 10:36* and *Hebrews 12:1-3* -- “You need to **persevere**” (*Heb 10:36*) and “let us run with **perseverance**” (*Heb. 12:1*) considering “him who **endured**” (*Heb. 12:3*).

4. Redefining Church: The Tabernacled of God in the Weak Church through the Power of Corporate Prayer

“The aim of the prayer meeting is to get heaven open and the glory down.” P.F. BRESEE

The Call to the Church of the Nazarene to be “Houses of Prayer” and “Centers of Holy Fire”

“Perhaps no missionary work needs more to be done than the planting of centers of fire in this country.” P.F. BRESEE

The Weak Church, the Glory, and the Lamb

“John saw Jesus’ Glory tabernacled in the most unlikely of places: “When I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, and among the lampstands was someone ‘like a son of man.’” (*Rev. 1:12-13*)

Weakness in Heaven: John sees the throne of God and then at his right hand he sees a Lamb “looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne.” (*Rev 5:6*)