

## “The Spirit Helps us in our Weakness”

**Romans 8:22-27** <sup>22</sup> We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. <sup>23</sup> Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. <sup>24</sup> For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? <sup>25</sup> But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently. <sup>26</sup> 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. <sup>27</sup> And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will.

**“The Spirit Helps Us in our Weakness”**

A handshake can be quite deceptive. Apparently, we are able to determine the character of another person by the way they shake our hand. Therefore, I was taught to deceive people by shaking hands with using a firm grip while looking them in the eye to give an impression of confidence. In reality you have to be careful with how firm your grip is. It's rude to be too firm, to give the “man-shake”. That just says you're trying to dominate the person on the other end. Sometimes when you're just gripping the way you always do you hear bones crack. You want to ask, “Did I hurt you?” but asking that in the context of a handshake will draw attention to their weakness and handshaking is not a time to point out another's vulnerability because of that first impression thing. I had a very bad experience of this once. I was shaking hands with an elderly woman as she was leaving church and at just normal strength she yelped because it hurt. It's hard to know how firm is too firm.

And then there's the other side of the handshake, where you have to be careful not to be too gentle. You see, people don't respect a person who gives you the “dead fish” or “limp squid” handshake particularly if the hand is sweaty. A limp handshake is a sign of weakness, submissiveness, lack of confidence, incompetence, impotence, obsequiousness, effeminacy, cowardliness, etc., isn't it? I used to work with a guy who gave a “limp squid” and it didn't help that he always had this stupid grin on his face. If first impressions from handshakes were to reign the day, he'd be nothing more than fish bait now. Yet, at heart he was quite brave and assertive. He just wasn't going to play the handshake game of trying to prove who's the strongest and most confident. He didn't agree with our culture's idolatry of strength and thought gentleness was the better way. At heart, he was actually a fairly strong person regardless of the limp squid.

My friend was right. Our culture really does have a problem with individuals wanting to appear strong rather than weak. We want to be successful and to have the personality characteristics that go along with success – independence, confidence, assertiveness, fearlessness in the face of risk. There's also a strand of this strength worship that wants to appear not only successful, but also powerful. That's what bling, cell phones, and Blackberry's are all about. There is no one more powerful than someone who looks rich and possesses the ability to cut a deal at any minute or is just so important that they have to be reached at anytime.

## “The Spirit Helps us in our Weakness”

Some of us may have come through the trials of life to have another definition of what a strong person is, a bit of a weaker definition where strength is endurance in the face of adversity and suffering. It's no secret that in the midst of affliction that a person's true character comes out. To mention a name that we all know, Myrtle Lane is one of the strongest people we know. She's endured the tragic loss of her husband and her disability without becoming bitter. Instead she's stayed on top of the game managing to keep her independence and stay involved in life in such a way as we would call normal. She's managed to do so by accepting help when help was needed and doing for herself what she could still do. She has not let weakness be a source of shame for her.

Jesus gave us a new and even paradoxical definition of strength. Weakness ultimately is strength or should I say our weakness is his strength. He showed us that utter dependence on God the Father, which by this world's definition of strength is weakness, is where true strength is found. Faith, trust in God and living according to God's desires, instead of asserting ourselves to fulfill our own desires is true strength. God's desire for us is that we live our lives asserting ourselves in love for others rather than ourselves trusting that God will take care of us.

In Romans Paul fills in this teaching a bit. He teaches that we are able to live by faith, hope, and love because God has poured his love into us by the Holy who now dwells in us. He writes at Romans 5:5, “And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.” We are able to have faith and to love as God desires us because God the Holy Spirit has come to live in us and as Paul says in Romans 8:26 the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness.

Living the weak life, the life of faith, requires a predisposition of hope and a lot of prayer. To hope is to always be looking for God to “work all things to the good for those who love him and are called according to his purposes”. That's us. If nothing can separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ which is the power that ultimately holds this universe together, then we must only through ourselves upon God's love in the real hope, the real knowing that God will do what's best for us. Hope is not wishful thinking. It is knowing that God will act according to his love for us and therefore we hope and live according to faith.

The life of faith necessitates prayer, time spent with God to learn his ways by coming to know his love for us. Paul says that the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness, when we don't know what to pray the Holy Spirit is praying in us for that which is in accordance with the will of God for us. God himself, in, through and as the Holy Spirit is with us, helping us. The word Paul uses for help here entails a coming along side of to help not just a wave of the hand saying “Make it so Number One”. God is personally present in us and alongside us to help us live the weak life through which he manifests his strength to put this world to rights with new life in Christ. When we are in prayer the Holy Spirit is with us interceding for us according to God's desires. God is with us in our weakness himself praying for what he wants for us. God is with us, really with us and this is the basis for our being able to live a life not of asserting ourselves for ourselves but rather in love for others, the very love God has poured into us through the

“The Spirit Helps us in our Weakness”

Holy Spirit. God is with us therefore we can live lives according to faith and hope and the Holy Spirit is here to help us in our weakness concerning this task.  
Amen.