

The Weakest of These  
A Four-Part Bible Study on Weakness and Perfect Christian Living  
By Deaconess Janet Nicol

Leaders' Guide

Part 1 Weak in the Body

1. According to this, who can be considered the weakest among us? *(The hungry, the thirsty, the strangers among us [refugees], prisoners, the homeless, and the sick.)*
2. What does the scripture say about the poor and the sojourner? *(They should be cared for, physically and spiritually.)*
3. What is God saying about our status as a sojourner? *(Christians are sojourners in this world. We are strangers to the culture. 1 Peter 2:11 points this out. We are only passing through for a time here in this life until we are taken to eternal life.)*
4. How can being poor and a sojourner reflect weakness? *(Being poor and a stranger reflects vulnerability to others. The poor, needy, and lost in a strange land need direction, food, and shelter and cannot obtain it easily on their own. They need to rely on others.)*
5. What is our responsibility towards the sojourners we meet in life? *(Christians need to provide physical care as well as spiritual care to others because we know what it is like and wish to comfort others with the comfort we have.)*
6. What is our responsibility towards our fellow believers? Towards our neighbors? *(Our responsibility toward these is the same as they are for sojourners.)*
7. How does building up our fellow believers and neighbors give us joy and hope? *(God created us to be social. Through our communication and caring for each other, we not only give encouragement, but we receive it as well. It is through the compassion that we receive from Christ's atonement for us that we are able to give compassion towards others around us.)*

Part 2 Weakness of the Mind

1. Who does the world or culture consider weak-minded? *(Often those who are faithful to the Word and humble are perceived as weak-minded because it may appear they let others trample all over them. Sometimes those who are mourning a*

*loss are considered weak because they are unable to focus. Those who live in poverty and have less education as well as those who do not have power or influence in society are often considered weak-minded.)*

2. What are some examples in history, especially in the Bible, of God using what is foolish to shame the wise? *(The first announcement of Jesus' birth came to lowly shepherds. Fishermen and tax collectors were chosen to be Apostles to the Lord. Adulterers and prostitutes are in the genealogy of Jesus, just to name a few.)*
3. Who do the Apostles think are the weakest or least among the people? *(The children were very often considered the least in society especially in the 1<sup>st</sup> century. They no doubt thought it would be a nuisance for Jesus to have to touch them. It is only natural that the Apostles were influenced by that cultural opinion. They even seemed to think a different opinion on who were the greatest when they asked Jesus about it.)*
4. What is Jesus' reaction to that opinion? *(Jesus surprised them all by bringing forth a child and declaring a weak and insignificant creature as an example of one who should humble himself in order to be great in His kingdom.)*
5. What is shocking about his reaction?*(As part of His reaction, Jesus said that infants believe in Him. This is shocking to us as we often think it requires our own intellectual efforts to believe. The warning to those who hinder that belief or to cause them to stumble in their faith is severe.)*
6. What is humbling about Jesus' words in these two passages? *(The idea that we have some ability to obtain faith on our own is shattered in Jesus' words. It is humbling to understand that we have NOTHING to bring to the table when it comes to our faith or our salvation. It also reminds us that we need to treat those in our society who are the weakest, such as unborn babies or small children with the utmost care and respect in the same way Jesus does. We should bring them to Him in the waters of Holy Baptism.)*
7. How do Jesus' words about the least among us give hope? *(Knowing that Christ considers the least of us in any culture or society as worthy of His salvation gives us hope because despite what the world tells us about who is the least or the greatest, in the eyes of God, we have our Advocate, Jesus and we are all equal.)*

### Part 3 Weak in Spirit

1. What parts of the body of Christ (the church) might be considered weaker than others? *(Perhaps those who are struggling with illness, shame, doubt, depression, or many other mental health issues.)*

2. Who might be considered unpresentable? *(Due to the stigma of many mental health issues, some people might be considered unpresentable. Perhaps also we tend to think of some sins as more shameful, such as divorce, abortion, substance abuse etc. It is important to note that these areas require our care and concern without the condemnation, however, many Christians feel that they cannot share their past sins for fear of that condemnation.)*
3. How might the church have joy when we suffer along with those who are weaker? *(When we consider that all of us have fallen short of [Romans 3:11] and remember that "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." 1 John 1:8-9, we discover love that the Holy Spirit works in us towards our fellow Christians as well as unbelievers and we become more capable of reaching out to others in that love in order to share their burden and offer comfort. Knowing we are forgiven by the most holy God gives us the ability to forgive and receive others. This is the Biblical joy that we experience.)*
4. How do Jesus' words in Matthew 5: 1-5 give you hope? *(It is comforting and hopeful that in our weaknesses we have our Lord, Savior, and Creator to give us the things we need to overcome and be resilient. He comes to us in our brokenness. He blesses us in our weaknesses. He doesn't watch from afar but provides tangible ways to deliver His grace through Word and Sacrament.)*
5. How had the Triune God used weakness to make the Apostle Paul understand grace? *(God gave Paul a weakness in order to keep Paul humble. Paul even said it was to keep him from becoming conceited in thinking that he, Paul, had anything to do with why God chose him to reveal to others the truth of Jesus. This way, Paul could understand that grace comes from outside us.)*
6. Why boast of weakness? Should we be thankful for our weakness? *(We are commanded to be thankful in ALL circumstances. That means even when we have a closet full of skeletons and when we are feeling the pain of past mistakes or the pain of having been hurt by others' action. It is often in our wrestling match with our weaknesses that God's strengths show forth. So, this gives us a reason to boast of those weaknesses. Not because we are proud of them, but because they give God the opportunity to show His strengths.)*
7. What is Jesus implying about faith and weakness? *(Jesus is saying that Christian maturity in faith is not measured by how independent we are but on how dependent we are on Him.)*
8. How has God used weakness in you? *(Answers will vary)*

9. How have your weaknesses given you joy and hope? *(Answers will vary)*

#### Part 4 Perfection and Weakness

1. What do you think Jesus meant when he said “be perfect” as part of His sermon on the mount? *( The important thing to realize here is that Jesus says be perfect AS your Father in heaven is perfect. He is setting God as the standard and not others’ or us. All through this chapter before this statement Jesus is exposing the folly of comparing ourselves to other people. God is the only measurement that matters when we are thinking of our lives as Christians.)*
2. How do the letters by John and James help us to understand what Jesus meant? *(Keeping in mind the translation of telios which usually means completeness, we can see that Jesus is not saying we can even be perfect in the sense of having no flaws but rather becoming more mature in our faith.)*
3. How does this understanding of perfection compare to the culture’s understanding of it? *(We tend to compare ourselves to others and think of perfection as having the fewest of flaws, a 100% rating in a competition with others. This is an unattainable goal for all of us.)*
4. How does it compare to your own understanding of perfection? *( Answers will vary.)*
5. How did Jesus demonstrate His perfection? *(By fulfilling the prophecies and suffering for our sakes He completed the work of our salvation. When He said, “It is finished,” He had reached His goal. He led the flawless life we can’t and completed it with perfection FOR US.)*
6. As mature Christians, how do we obtain perfection? *(Even as Jesus said to be perfect as our Father in heaven is, he also said to be merciful as our Father is. [Luke 6:36] We need to always have God as our standard. And we need to remember that we can’t reach the sinless, flawless perfection of God, but we cling to the perfect work of Jesus to atone for our sins. So, we think in terms of reaching a goal which is eternal life with Him. That makes us complete. )*
7. How does knowing that our weaknesses relate to our perfection gives us hope and joy? *(When we begin to think of perfection in the way the Bible intends us to, not free of flaws but made complete by Christ who has atoned for our sins, we can experience hope and joy because we realize God uses our weaknesses to bring us closer to Him and to teach us that we are dependent upon Him. His grace is good enough for us. Our Creator has regarded the lowly [Psalm 138:6] and He has welcomed us into His presence, through Christ, to be made complete and whole. Life is truly worth living under these circumstances.)*