

YOUR INADEQUACY AND GOD'S POWER

Ephesians 1:18-19

Anytime we face something new in our lives we face the fear of inadequacy. This is a very simple fear to describe. It's when you look at your life and you think, "I don't have what it takes." I don't have what it takes to be a parent, to be a leader, to be a believer. Have you ever felt that way? We all have. Everyone in this room has. But God doesn't want us to feel this way.

Ephesians 1:19 says "*I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know his incomparably great power for us who believe.*" 2 Timothy 1:7 "*For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.*" That first prayer is my prayer for you today. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be opened, that you can see from the inside out how great God's power is for your life. That's the answer to this fear of inadequacy in our lives. You might circle "*his incomparably great power*". He wants to share it with us. How great is God's power? He keeps the world spinning. He keeps the sun burning. He takes billions of stars and hangs them in place and keeps them there, every minute of every day and the Bible says He wants to take that great power and transform it into our lives and make it work in our lives. He wants to take our feeling of "I don't have what it takes" and He wants to express to us that He has what it takes in everyday life.

But we do feel inadequate at times. This feeling of inadequacy started way back in the Garden of Eden. The Bible tells us that Adam and Eve bit into the fruit and they realized they were naked and they were ashamed.

That's not a bad description of what inadequacy is all about. All of a sudden you've got this terrible realization of what's missing in your life. And you struggle with that.

What's our natural response to feeling inadequate? We cover up! That's one possible response. Adam and Eve sewed some fig leaves. We cover up. We tell people we're fine when we feel so terrible inside. We don't want to let anybody know.

Another response is we hide. Adam and Eve hid in the bushes. We're a little more sophisticated. We hide in our office or in our house or in our car. We say, "I'm never going to let myself be hurt like that again. I'm never going to face a situation like that again. I just won't go. I won't be there." Do you ever do that when you feel inadequate? Do you hide?

Still another response is we put down others. This is probably the most natural response to feeling inadequate. Adam and Eve blamed each other. When you feel inadequate, the most natural response is to put somebody else down. I'm feeling inadequate so let's make them feel inadequate, too. We do that to each other. We try to bring other people down to the level we're feeling.

These responses -- covering up, hiding, putting down -- if you do these things in life it's not going to make you feel any more powerful or any more adequate. It's just going to confirm and strengthen the feelings of inadequacy that we all face in our lives. There is a different direction to take -- God's direction on how we ought to respond.

You see, I am set free from the fear of inadequacy not by great successes, but from how I respond to difficult circumstances. It's not great successes

that make me feel more adequate. A lot of people think it is -- if they can have a few successes in life they would get over the hump. It doesn't work. Many times the more successes you have the more you feel like you have to match up to it. You feel more and more inadequate in life.

Think about the entertainment world. Richard Burton admitted that one of the reasons he became an alcoholic was because he was terrified someone would discover who he really was. Barbara Streisand took twenty years off from singing because she felt inadequate. With a voice like hers she felt inadequate!

Successes don't do it. The way to begin to feel a new sense of confidence and strength and power in life is to begin to learn how to respond to difficult circumstances. When you and I feel inadequate God sends difficult circumstances into our life. We can respond in one of two ways. We can get mad and bitter and feel more and more inadequate or we can understand the way God wants us to respond. Once you've learned that, you begin to build confidence into your life. It would be easy this morning to just spend twenty minutes building you up, building up your confidence, telling you how great you are and you can go out and do anything. That would last about as far as the end of the parking lot, until you hit the first difficulty in your life. That's not God's way of building confidence into our lives. His way is to send into our lives some tough circumstances, to show us how to respond. And when you respond in the right way, He builds confidence into your life.

Now, let me talk about three circumstances God most popularly sends into all our lives. And for each circumstance, there is a response you and I can make that can build his confidence into our lives.

1. INCURABLE WEAKNESS

In 2 Corinthians 12, the apostle Paul, as great as he was, struggled with some incurable weaknesses in his life. And because of this he asked God to take it away from him. God said no. Paul says, *"But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you. For my power is made perfect in weakness.' For when I am weak then I am strong."*

What is an incurable weakness? Some of you get weak at the knees when you see a chocolate bar. Is that what we're talking about? No. We're not talking about temptation.

An incurable weakness is a limitation. It can be physical, emotional, a talent limitation. It's any limitation in your life that's inherited or something you can't change. Paul had a name for his weakness. He called it his thorn in the flesh. We don't know what it was. A lot of people have a lot of different ideas. Some people think he had poor eyesight. Or maybe a back pain. Someone said maybe it was his wife. But we don't know whether he was married or not. Whatever it was, it was some kind of a physical limitation in his life.

"My power is made perfect in weakness." Doesn't that sound strange? Doesn't it seem God would make his power more perfect in our lives by causing us to be more powerful? But it doesn't work that way. When I face a weakness in my life it invites me to respond to God in a way that can build a new sense of confidence. The Living Bible translates this verse, *"My power shows up best in weak people."*

Paul saw God's power in his weakness although the fact is he didn't heal him. How can you see God's power in a physical limitation in your life?

How can you see God's power in the fact that you're not as talented as somebody else? One word: Dependence. So, how do I respond to an incurable weakness in my life? With dependence.

I think a lot of times when people think of depending on God, they think of a large rock and you're leaning on Him and it's a very secure place. Maybe that's part of the picture but it's not all of it. I think of it not as leaning on a large rock, but as getting on a large rocket. God is going somewhere. When you depend on Him, it's like getting on the space shuttle, it's going to take off and fly.

There's a power there that you don't have in your life and depending on Him ties you in to that power. The Bible tells us apart from Christ we can do nothing but in Christ we can do all things. Proverbs 10: 8 says, "*A self sufficient fool falls flat on his face.*" That's pretty simple!

There are some people who come to Jesus Christ and say, "Lord, look at what you've got! I'm pretty great! I've got all this intelligence. I was brought up in this Christian home and know the Bible and all this stuff." God can't do very much with that kind of a person. They're depending on their self. But when someone comes to Christ and says, "I need You. If I'm going to do this God, I'm totally depending on You." God loves to turn our greatest weakness into our greatest strength. If you feel you have a weak faith or no faith, depend on Him and let Him turn it into your greatest strength. That's what weakness is sent into our lives for.

With each of these, I want to give you a practical place to start. Depending on God is a huge thing in life. Where do you get started? What's

something you can regularly do to build that attitude into your life? The starting place is this: Worship weekly.

There is something about worship that reminds us of how powerful God is. It's a regular reminder we do in our lives. The psalmist says in Psalm 63 says, "*I've seen you in the sanctuary and I've beheld your power and your glory.*" He also says in Psalm 40:17 "*I am poor and weak and yet the Lord is thinking about me right now.*"

That's what worship does for us. We realize we're poor and weak, we had a tough week, we blew it! But God is thinking about me right now! I think the most significant thing that happens in worship is not that I come and think about God but that I realize how much He's thinking about me every moment of every day of my life. That builds into my heart an ability to depend on Him.

It's like a weekly exercise to build your spiritual muscle. That's what dependence on God means. One of the things God sends into our lives to build confidence in Him is incurable weakness.

Now, another circumstance that God sends us in order to build confidence in him and not in ourselves is when we encounter

2. UNREASONABLE PEOPLE

Do you know any unreasonable people? Don't look now. We all have unreasonable people in our lives. They are a part of our lives. One person said unreasonable people are like heavenly sandpaper. They smooth out the rough edges of your life.

What does an unreasonable person look like? Timothy faced a lot of them. They criticize much more than they encourage. They attack you,

they're always on the offensive. They always want to get you involved in arguments. It seems like you can never just have a discussion with this person, it's always an argument. They tend to major on minors and they keep you from focusing on what's really important. They are often filled with selfishness. Does that remind you of anyone? Sometimes you work with them. Sometimes they are in your small group. Sometimes they are in your car pool. Some of you have so many rough edges in your life that God has seen to it, that you're married to your heavenly sandpaper!

Whose words do you remember more? The encourager or the critic? The critic. That shows the power of the unreasonable person in our life. God has sent these people into your life to build into your life a sense of His power.

I was joking a moment ago about you being married to your heavenly sandpaper. The truth of the matter is you can't be that close to somebody without them irritating you every once in a while. Isn't that true? You just can't.

I don't understand how in the world I can go so quickly from wanting to spend the rest of my life with my wife to "I can't stand it when you do that thing!" But it happens. Sometimes that's the person God is using. I have a lot more rough edges than my wife. That means she has to be a lot more irritated than I am! Ask her.

God has sent these people into your life to develop a sense of His power. So how do I respond to unreasonable people? With patience! Again and again the Bible encourages us to be patient with unreasonable people. When you love the unlovely you're acting most like God. Jesus said to love your

enemies so that you can be just like your Father who is in heaven. He causes the sun to rise on the evil and the good.

Ephesians 4:2 says, "*Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love.*" Make allowance. If you're driving and following a large motor home, the wind is blowing and the motor home is weaving back and forth. If you're going to pass that motor home, you're going to give it some allowance so it doesn't bump into you. This verse is saying make allowance for people. Give them an extra lane or two. Realize they're going to weave sometimes, they're going to make some mistakes in life. This verse is reminding us you've got to give others the freedom to fail because you fail, too. That's part of being patient with other people.

Romans 12 says, "*Be at peace with everyone just as much as possible.*" There is only so much I can do. But as much as you can do, that's what God expects you to do. You can't be patient for them but you can be patient for you. Realize there is a difference between patience and capitulation. You can give to others without giving in to others. Being patient doesn't mean you always let them have their way or ruin your business. Being patient simply means that you love them no matter what. That's tough. For everybody I know that's tough.

Where do you start? How can you develop this attitude in your life? The starting place is to picture God's love for you. See it in your mind. Paul says in Ephesians, "*I pray that you may have power to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ.*" He's praying that you can see it! It's one thing for a guy to stand up here and talk to you about how great God's love

is. It's quite another thing to grab hold of it, to picture it, to see it for yourself.

Have you ever gotten one of those postcards of the Grand Canyon that someone sends you? How can you reduce the Grand Canyon to a 5X7 postcard? You can look at that postcard but you'll never understand the grandeur of it. To really understand the Grand Canyon you have to go to it and walk right up to the edge where you could fall off and see it for yourself.

Paul writes and says, I want you to picture God's love. I want you to see it for yourself, how high, how long, how wide, how deep it is. Once you see that, you'll have a new strength to love other people. Once you picture how deeply God loves you, you can love other people. God is so patient with me. He knows every fault in my life and every stupid thing I think and say and yet He still loves me, He's still patient with me and shows His grace to me. That helps me be patient with other people. That's the number one thing that helps me be patient with other people! Seeing God's love for you strengthens your patience with others.

Finally, the third circumstance that God sends your way to build confidence is

3. IMPOSSIBLE PROBLEMS

A lot of times we think if God is trying to help me become more confident why does he often put me in places where it seems like I can't succeed? How does that build my self confidence? He's not trying to build self confidence. He's trying to build our confidence in Him. That's where the real power is. That's where the strength is.

Jesus called His disciples timid only once. They had a lot of problems as disciples. They made a lot of mistakes and did a lot of dumb things but there was only one time that He called them timid. It was when they were in the middle of the Sea of Galilee and a huge storm came by. These disciples were fishermen. They knew a dangerous storm and they knew this one was dangerous. They were afraid for their lives. They were in a panic, running around, wondering what to do. Jesus was sleeping through the whole thing. Finally He woke up and stretched out His arms and said, "Peace, be still" and the storm was calm. He looked at His disciples and said, "You timid disciples! You men of little faith!" I think, if I'm in the middle of a hurricane don't I have the right to be a little frightened? Be in a panic? I think the reason Jesus was upset was because they were focused on the storm around them and not on Jesus Christ who was in the boat, who had the answers.

So, how do I respond to impossible problems? With faith.

The disciples were in over their heads literally, they couldn't handle this. That's not what upset Jesus. It was the fact that they didn't turn to Him and say, "You can handle this." It's OK to admit you can't handle it but when we do we need to look to the God who can.

Look at Luke 1:37, "*God can do anything.*" Then in 18:27 "*God can do things that are not possible for people to do.*" Of course He can, He's God. But have you discovered that in a personal way in your life? The way that God helps you to discover that, is by sending impossible problem in your life. Jesus said to His disciples at the end of that storm, "*Why were you so fearful? Don't you even yet have confidence in Me?*" Impossible problems are an invitation to have confidence in God, not in ourselves.

Do I ever feel inadequate? You better believe I do! Coming up here in front almost every week trying to share a message that I don't know whether people will listen to or not I feel a little inadequate to try to do that! This fear of inadequacy more than any other is the fear I've faced in my life. I was already in my 30's when I started to speak to a crowd. I'd rather go to the dentist than come to the front. Maybe some of you have faced the same thing. You're going to face some of this fear in your life.

When I first came to Fil-Am about four years ago after pastoring a church for six years in New York, I was somewhat relieved because it means I can just lose myself in whichever church I was going to attend. I didn't even have to say I was a pastor so no one would ask me to preach. My mistake was that I called Pastor Romy before coming here asking if he could accommodate me in their house. But, I shouldn't worry, I told myself, because he is the pastor and he assumes the preaching task. The problem is, upon arriving here, he said that he resigned from the church a few days before I called him. He stayed in the church for another year and during that time he gave me opportunities to preach. Until the church called me to become the regular preacher.

I knew more than anything else that God wanted me to be here but even knowing that you can still feel inadequate. There's a line from a song that goes, "Little becomes much when I place it in the Master's hands." My little becomes much when I place it in the Master's hands.

All of us, when we look at our lives from time to time, we feel like we don't have much to give, much to offer. But little becomes much when you

place it in the Master's hands. You may not feel very adequate as a parent, but your little becomes much when you place it in Christ's hands.

You may not feel very adequate as a leader, a manager, a husband, a wife, but your little becomes much. He can multiply it when you place it in the hands of Jesus Christ.

A starting place for recognizing how much God can do in your life is an object lesson God's put all around us. Look at what he has made! Jeremiah 32 "Lord you have made the heavens and the earth by your great power. *Nothing is too hard for you.*" And a verse to remind us of God's great power is in Ephesians 3:20-21 "*Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to Him be the glory.*"

One of the characteristics of this fear of inadequacy is that you feel like you're all alone. You feel like you're the only one that feels this way. Everybody else is filled with confidence. They're going through life great. But you don't feel like you've got much sometimes. You feel like you're all alone. That is not true. Just look through the Bible at some of the people who faced this fear of inadequacy. Moses faced this fear. He wrote the first five books of the Bible. But he faced this fear. Joshua faced this fear. He led the people into the promised land. But he faced this fear. Jeremiah who was a great prophet faced this fear. Peter faced this fear -- one of the disciples. Timothy faced this fear -- one of the leaders of the early church. They faced it for different reasons. Moses felt like he couldn't talk well enough. Jeremiah felt like he was too young. Peter felt like he was too brash and

emotional. Timothy felt like he couldn't deal with people. But they faced it and they dealt with it.

Undealt with, this fear of inadequacy can steal your life's purpose away from you. But dealt with, the Bible presents an exciting picture of God being able to transform people who face this fear when they give it to him. It presents a picture of people being transformed.

Moses confronts Pharaoh and Jeremiah becomes a prophet and Peter speaks so confidently that thousands of lives are changed when he speaks. Timothy becomes a pastor at Ephesus. Why? Because they looked at their fear of inadequacy and they trusted God. They found out that He is able. He is able to do immeasurably more than anything you can ask or imagine.

You may be thinking you don't see that happening in your life. God's going to lovingly continue to send into your life these circumstances, weaknesses, unreasonable people, impossible problems. Every time they come Jesus is inviting you "Respond to Me." And you're going to learn to do that and as you learn He's going to build into your life a new sense of confidence.

Folks, let the power of God's love make the difference in your life.

