



When I Am Weak, He Is Strong By Stephenie Hovland

Leader Guide

NOTE: Leaders and participants are encouraged to look up Bible passages. Passages are printed below for ease in presentation. Suggestions are given to cut sections if time is short and to add as time allows. Good discussion may mean parts of the Bible study are done at home instead. The author, is willing to meet with your group through video, to assist with this study (as her schedule allows.) Contact her at her website _____.

Opening: Speak or sing one or more verses of “Jesus Loves Me” (*Lutheran Service Book* #588).
NOTE: You could also split the song and put a verse at the beginning and a verse at the end. Both English and Spanish lyrics are included in *LSB*.

NOTE, TOO: Complete lyrics are included on the last page of these Leader Notes (and may also be found on line); however, only verses 1 and 4 are printed in *LSB* (as 1 and 2) — and there are changes to the words in *LSB* verse 2. The words in the hymnal are strongly recommended.

Opening Prayer: Holy Spirit, You are our Comforter and the ongoing strength in our lives. Remind us of Your presence as we think about being vulnerable and weak. Show us how to live as the body of Christ, living fully in weakness and showing Your strength as we support our Christian sisters. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Many people take pride in self-reliance. We often see greater value in overcoming hardships through strength than in living out the small, simple moments. When we sing songs like “Jesus Loves Me,” we think they belong only to little children, even though we are children of God.

We hide weaknesses or try to make them disappear altogether. When someone asks us how we’re doing, we rarely admit when we feel depressed or overwhelmed. We take pride in working ourselves to the point of exhaustion, depression, and sickness. We may think vulnerability is weakness, and that weakness is sinful and shameful. Let’s explore what the Bible says.

I Am Weak, But He Is Strong

List some words or images that remind you of strength. _____ examples: superheroes, bodybuilding, people who never cry, military, single mom who works multiple jobs, etc.
Of weakness. _____

examples: sickness, death, babies, delicate items that are breakable, etc.

What does 1 Corinthians 1:26–31 say about power and weakness?

For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. And because of him you are in

Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”

NOTE: If time, have a discussion about the weak and strong (highlighted) words in that passage. It seems to flip our idea of what the almighty, powerful God would want and how He uses us in this world.

In whom should we boast? In the presence of God, in the Lord.

How can we know God values us and believe the words *Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so*”? Fill in the blanks below and be able to say “Jesus loves me.” with confidence.

Isaiah 43:1: *But now thus says the LORD, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.*

We don’t find our strength within ourselves, though we continue to try. What do you do that makes you feel strong (physically, emotionally, intellectually)? Encourage people to not just give the “church answers.” If lifting weights makes them feel strong, great!

When we take our focus off our own strength and on to God’s strength being shown in our lives, then we actually feel stronger: We realize that our real strength came from God all along. And we realize our own personal strength is never enough for the trials of this life. If time, you can ask if anyone wants to share about a time when they realized their strength was not enough for a certain trial, that they needed God to get them through.

The Old Testament has several passages about God’s strength. Read these verses aloud, as statements you believe and have witnessed. **NOTE:** You may want to encourage everyone to stand, look confident (shoulders back, back straight) and speak boldly, together. You may choose to say the reference first, and then they say the actual Bible passage. Another option is to print out the verses and ask for three volunteers to read them aloud for the group.

Psalm 46:1: *God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.*

Psalm 28:7: *The LORD is my strength and my shield; in him my heart trusts, and I am helped; my heart exults, and with my song I give thanks to him.*

Psalm 18:1: *I love you, O LORD, my strength.*

If they were standing, ask them to be seated.

Walking with Me on the Way

In the 80’s, a national company launched a series of commercials that proclaimed, “Never let them see you sweat.” That commercial still sticks in our memories. We love the idea that we might always appear to be strong. It doesn’t matter what’s on the inside; we should never show weakness.

NOTE: Optional added discussion: Can you remember any other ads that make you think of strength? The Michelin Man or the Brawny Man may come to mind.

On the other hand, the Bible has countless references to people who are in distress, reaching out to the Lord for help. Look at these people to see real-life examples:

NOTE: If time is short, encourage the participants to look up Job and Jeremiah at home. Just focus on Jesus.

Job: Read the whole book when you have time. Focus on **Job 30:16–19** today.

And now my soul is poured out within me; days of affliction have taken hold of me. The night racks my bones, and the pain that gnaws me takes no rest. With great force my garment is disfigured; it binds me about like the collar of my tunic. God has cast me into the mire, and I have become like dust and ashes. See how Job has hit the bottom? See how he feels? _____ Point out the phrases (highlighted above) that show his misery. Mire can refer to a swamp or bog, and means the situation is distressing and hard to get out of.

Jeremiah: The great prophet Jeremiah had his days too. How does he pray when he is being persecuted? _____ **Read Jeremiah 20:7–8.**

O LORD, you have deceived me, and I was deceived; you are stronger than I, and you have prevailed. I have become a laughingstock all the day; everyone mocks me. For whenever I speak, I cry out, I shout, “Violence and destruction!” For the word of the Lord has become for me a reproach and derision all day long. **NOTE**: Discuss how we might be surprised by Jeremiah speaking so negatively with God. This is not a model of how we should pray on a regular basis, but it does show that God is open to all our moods and words. He wants to hear it all. We can “vent” to God.

Jesus: Even Jesus suffered. We know about the cross, but let’s look at the period just before the Crucifixion in **Luke 22:41–44**.

And he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and knelt down and prayed, saying, “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.” And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him. And being in agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.

Jesus was human and God at the same time. And yet, He wasn’t always tough and strong as some people think Christians have to be. Here we see vulnerability and weakness. But it isn’t a weakness of faith. It isn’t a sin. Jesus needs His heavenly Father in the very stressful, painful time ahead. He feels that pain before it even arrives. He doesn’t deny it or put on a good show. Jesus goes to God in prayer. Notice that before He prays so intensely, He has brought his closest friends with Him. They are there to pray for Him and be with Him. That is what we are to do as well. We take our fears, pains, and suffering to God. We know He is here with us, to strengthen and comfort. And, as Jesus invited His disciples, we ask our sisters in Christ to support us in our misery. We give and receive love in times of weakness and strength.

Light and Love to All Who Live

How do we support one another as we walk alongside our sisters? Let’s think about what can benefit our fellow Christians whether they are close and in-person, or they are across the globe. We know that supporting our sisters in Christ is not always easy. We, like other families, have our share of conflict and awkward moments. Nevertheless, we are one family in Christ. He unites us, no matter our different personalities or our weird casseroles. Read **1 Corinthians 12: 21–26**. The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.

Notice the differences that come together to make the body. How do you see that in your family or church community? Ask participants to share positive stories or examples of diverse people coming together in unity. It can be diverse ethnicities, backgrounds, ages, etc.

Read that last verse again (1 Corinthians 12:26).

If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.

Notice where we are united. We unite in suffering and support. We unite in honor and rejoicing.

How have you seen people supporting one another during suffering? Encourage a few stories here — personal, congregational, in your community, or things they've seen in the news.

Rejoicing together? Encourage a few stories here.

NOTE: For the following section, if time is short, choose two for your group to look up. Choose one that affirms something they already do, and choose the other one to be something they may struggle with or may not think about. Encourage them to finish this section at home.

Identify specific ways, in the following, we can walk alongside our fellow women in mission:

Matthew 25:35–40: For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.' Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.' (take care of physical needs)

Romans 12:10: Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. (show honor)

Romans 12:13: Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. (give to the needy and show hospitality)

Romans 12:15: Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. (rejoice and weep together)

Galatians 6:2: Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. (bear burdens together)

Philippians 2:3–4: Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. (think of others first)

Colossians 4:5: Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. (gracious, well-chosen words and using our time wisely)

1 Thessalonians 5:11: Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing. (encouragement)

Titus 2:3–5: Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled. (mentoring)

James 5:16: Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. (prayer)

The women involved in ministries like LWML have servant hearts, always looking for ways to serve. Instead of taking the above list as a mandate or to-do list, look on it as opportunities to serve others. Don't add them to an already-too-busy agenda — especially if you are in a weak moment of your life.

Did you know it's okay to be the "weakest link" sometimes? Did you know you don't always have to be the strong one? Did you know God brings others into your life to serve you too? When we give, give, give, sometimes we forget to fill up. Our tank runs out of gas, and we need a refill. What are some ways we can keep ourselves from running empty?

NOTE: If time is running short, you may want to focus on the church-oriented references (choose two), because the first two will probably come up in the discussion after this section. Encourage participants to finish this section at home.

Genesis 2:3: So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation. (physical rest)

Psalms 127:2: It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for he gives to his beloved sleep. (sleep)

Matthew 11:28: Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. (come to Jesus for true rest)

Matthew 18:15: If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. (reconcile to one another)

Acts 2:42: And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. (study God's Word, attend church)

1 Corinthians 11:23–26: For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. (Lord's Supper)

2 Timothy 3:16–17: All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. (read and study Bible)

Hebrews 10:25: not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. (meet together and encourage)

What are some other things you do that help you feel renewed and refreshed to continue in God's work? Encourage discussion and remind participants that what renews and refreshes one person will be different for others. They should not act or talk negatively about what helps other people.

It's tough to serve God and others when our tanks are completely empty. God has not given us that expectation. We bring it on ourselves.

NOTE: If extra time, discuss this last thought. What expectations do we bring on ourselves, personally? What do we bring on one another? How do others in our family, congregation, community, and culture encourage us to be too busy and worn out every day?

How does **Galatians 6:9–10** guide you in serving others, especially your sisters in Christ? And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.

NOTE: If they need some extra help to discuss this, point them to the phrases in red.

“If we do not give up” is not telling us to work ourselves to death on a daily basis. “Not growing weary of doing good” and “not giving up” need extra attention and support. When we rely on God daily, get rest and refreshment daily, and support one another, we are less likely to be weary and burned out.

As you go about your week, think about times when God gives you opportunities:

- To serve another person
- To spend time in prayer and Bible study
- To rest
- To be served by others

NOTE: Suggest to participants that sections of the study not completed in class be used for devotion/quiet time at home.

Pray that God reminds you, His child, of His love and strength at all times.

Closing Prayer: Speak or sing the words of “Jesus Loves Me” one more time.
(See information in Opening about lyrics.)

Jesus Loves Me

1. Jesus loves me! This I know,
For the Bible tells me so;
Little ones to Him belong;
They are weak, but He is strong.

Refrain:

Yes, Jesus loves me!
Yes, Jesus loves me!
Yes, Jesus loves me!
The Bible tells me so.

2. Jesus loves me! This I know,
As He loved so long ago,
Taking children on His knee,
Saying, “Let them come to Me.” Refrain

3. Jesus loves me still today,
Walking with me on my way,
Wanting as a friend to give
Light and love to all who live. Refrain

4. Jesus loves me! He who died
Heaven’s gate to open wide;

He will wash away my sin,
Let His little child come in. Refrain

5. Jesus loves me! He will stay
Close beside me all the way;
Thou hast bled and died for me,
I will henceforth live for Thee. Refrain

Jesus Loves me by Anna B. Warner/David R. McGuire, Public Domain