

# “Isn’t Religion Just a Crutch for the Weak?”

Bible Study  
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# I Need An Answer

“Isn’t religion just a crutch for the weak?”



## WARMING UP

Cite three areas/qualities/characteristics in which you are “weak”:

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)

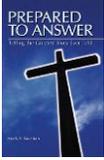
Easy or not so easy to admit that? (*Why or why not?*)

Strong ... powerful ... more than adequate ... cite some television commercials that put such concepts at the forefront of our desires:



What do you think people are charging when they say, “religion is a crutch”?





## Rev. Paustian's "devotion"

*take a moment to read through this introductory devotion and be ready and willing to share any "aha's" i.e. points of interest.*

Did you ever see your father cry when you were a child? Did you watch wide-eyed his grown-up shoulders tremble and his face sink into his hands? It was profoundly unsettling, in the way an earthquake is. That which nothing could shake, the very ground beneath your feet, was shaking. That's the look and feel of the moment in the gospels when Jesus was preparing to die, when the One who holds all things together seemed to be coming apart. What is the cracking you hear in the voice of God?

"My soul is overwhelmed ..." is the kind of thing I say, not God. And the words are repeated in the eyes that see every awful thing, those burdened, plaintive eyes.

"[I am] overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay ... with me."

Not since Bethlehem has Jesus seemed so small as this. As he braced for a weakling's death on a humiliating cross, unspeakably alone, he actually seemed to lean on the likes of Peter, James, and John.

But make no mistake. This weakness was a chosen weakness. It was our weakness that he found a way to share. It was our trembling in the face of dreadful things like death and hell – things no human being can handle – that was undoing him.

So effortlessly could he have pushed back the coming pain. Within any moment during that day, it would have been nothing for him to unveil the glory he hides – after the first ripping of the scourge ... after the twenty-first ... when a soldier held the first nail ... and took his measure with the hammer ... at any moment.

But where would that have left us?

The weakness of Christ just happens to be the flexing of power beyond our wildest dreams. This is what it looks like when God loves us in the muscular, mighty way he loves us. The One with the power to call 12 legions of angels to his instant defense has something else more spectacular still.

The power *not* to.

*Read Matthew 26:36-38*

Rev. Mark Paustian, *Prepared to Answer*, pp. 118-119

# **This Time Around**

*This time around let's read through Pastor Paustian's chapter chunk-by-chunk and evaluate / discuss as we go.*

## **Section 1 –“ You're pathetic”**

George Carlin once appeared on “Larry King Live” to explain that Christianity is a crutch, that all it really amounts to is a pure invention for weak, pathetic people. A rather grating comedian stands on the outside of the mystery – the only peace I've ever known, the only hope – and announces to the world that he, George Carlin, has seen to the center of it, has gotten to the bottom of it, and can tell us, “all it really is.” Apparently he has the omniscience to explain my own thinking to me and the real reason I believe.

I *need* to believe because I'm weak.

## **Section 2**

May I start by pointing out how many objections to Christianity are not really objections at all? “Religion is a crutch for the weak” is a potshot that entirely skirts the issue. (There are other examples: “You are Christian because you were born into it, and it's been poured down your throat. If you were raised Hindu, you would be Hindu.” I can just as easily say that materialism has been poured down your throat, especially if you come from the same culture I do.) All I'm saying is that you should be on the lookout for the many times refutation is no part of the argument being made. See how Carlin evades the central question that is posed by the boggling design of our world, the miracle of its existence, the tragic nature of humanity, the phenomenon of Holy Scripture, the deafening testimony from Jesus' own time and place, the most natural interpretation of all the historical data we have, the uniqueness of Christ himself as the compelling power behind the greatest movement in history, and so on. And not he or anyone else can suggest an anti-theistic scenario to explain it all better than faith does.

**Evaluations / Notes:**

**What sort of mindset is behind the charge “Religion is for the weak.”?**

**Explain why this a bogus objection to the Christian faith.**

**List some things which every denier of religion in general and the Christian faith in particular ought to consider and address:**

### Section 3

A man wishing to dismiss the experience of millions as fit for derision reaches for the most damning weapon he can find – and it is the fact that this faith has been giving strength to weak people for two thousand years, which, interestingly enough, is just what we would expect it to do IF IT WERE TRUE!

I look again and look closer at George Carlin, and although he means to rob me of everything I can truly call mine, the anger drains out of me. He's not getting any younger. For the man who asked Larry King, "Why can't we make fun of Christians?" the questions will all change in time. The truth is, for all his false bravado, there are things in this world he can't handle. None of us can. In addiction clinics and hospital morgues, in nursing homes and funeral homes are the hints of things that are bigger than we are. Our guilt and our death, the stench of our failures to love, the shame of our naked corpses, the very real judgment of God – before such things we are not merely weak, we are nothing at all.

### Section 4

A person can live an entire life around the question, Am I enough? "Am I adequate enough to face whatever life will send?" we ask, hungry for any evidence we can seek out in the affirmative. People daily enter the world, driven to validate the space they have taken up and to avoid the verdict "Not enough." But nothing could be clearer than the essential inadequacy of humanity. If we would try for a single hour to be holy – to think not of ourselves or any impure thing – we would see what weakness is. There is not one thing we can do to make our lives wind up any differently than they will. We are going to die. We are utterly powerless when it comes to things we care about most, and we are going to die. George, the questions will change.

"My life ... it runs out ... O God ... what now?"

### Evaluations / Notes:

**What has the Christian faith done for countless "weak" people?**

**What is the ultimate problem for the one who mocks Christians as weak?**

**What sort of things do people do in order to validate themselves as adequate and self-sufficient?**

## Section 5

Philip Yancey observed that in Old Testament times, when God provided the very kinds of evidence George Carlin demands – when the Lord showed up and left the scorch marks behind – it didn't result in the things God desires. Remarkably, people did not trust him or love him in any lasting way. They remained breathtakingly immature. Our faith and our love – the two things God says are all that matter – are the very things he doesn't win by sheer brute force. The pyrotechnic displays of raw power only made the ancient people cringe and run away. "But I," Jesus cried to a stunned crowd, "when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself."

In that lifting up that was the crucifixion of Christ, God made himself unthinkably weak. By this surrendering death, he has saved us all. We take our first tentative steps toward him, drawn in by the sight of emptied-out omnipotence and glory blown out like a candle. The Spirit empowers words such as "Come to me, all you who are weary ..." and we meet at the cross a God we trust because "when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly." This is the God we do love ... for loving us first.

## Section 6

There are answers we cannot find except in the scattered pieces of our imagined self-sufficiency. We still ask, "Am I enough?" with so much of our natural life emanating out of fear of the answer. But there are things we'll never know until the answer comes back no. We may need to fall in whatever way we fear the most to find it is not at all what we thought ... because we are caught by Christ. It is then that we come to feel the cords of love tighten, the ones that had been holding us all along. Then we come to know the strength of his hands. This is strength: when the exquisite words of the prophets and the apostles, the very things we long to say to God, at last become our own: "Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you." Nothing else even makes sense. A peace comes to us that no one can explain. One of his Hebrew names is *El Shaddai*, which means "the God who is enough." For every new inadequacy we are made to see in ourselves, there is always some new sufficiency to be found in him, and the finding is worth it all.

### Evaluations / Notes:

**What happened in the past when God gave a display of his sheer power?**

**How did God use weakness in his plan for us?**

**What must happen in order for us to desire what our God offers us in Christ?**

**How is God always enough for us who are so inadequate on our own?**

### **Final Section ...**

My many weaknesses are toothpick-sized slivers in places I can't ... quite ... reach. I've cried, "Jesus take them away, and see how I will serve you." But then I understand that the world doesn't need another display of self-sufficiency. It has plenty of "strong" people to look at. Let me offer something else to look at entirely: what it looks like to rely on Christ, if even to get up in the morning.

Learn how weaknesses can be befriended. Don't merely accept them; celebrate them and make them your boast. Throw your head back and laugh when you discover what the saying means, "When I am weak, then I am strong."

You see, Jesus loves us. That is enough.

### **Evaluations / Notes:**

**How does our weakness glorify God?**

**What is the Christian's proper response to their own weakness?**

## **Food for thought**

**Crutch or something else entirely? How so?**

### **Isaiah 40:29-31**

He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak ... the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

### **Joshua 1:9**

... Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go."

### **Psalms 124:8**

Our help is in the name of the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth.

### **Isaiah 43:1**

But now, this is what the LORD says-- he who created you ... "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine.

### **Psalms 118:14**

The LORD is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation.