

# Gideon Part 1: If God is With Us, Why Suffering?

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[ 0 : 00 ] Let me read from Judges chapter 6. The people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and the Lord gave them into the hand of Midian for seven years, and the hand of Midian overpowered Israel.

And because of Midian, the people of Israel made for themselves the dens that are in the mountains and the caves in the strongholds. For whenever the Israelites planted crops, the Midianites and the Amalekites, and the people of the east would come up against them. They would encamp against them and devour the produce of the land, as far as Gaza, and leave no sustenance in Israel, and no sheep or ox or donkey. For they would come up with their livestock and their tents.

They would come like locusts in Numbah. Both they and their camels could not be counted, so that they laid waste in the land as they came in. And Israel was brought very low because of Midian. And the people of Israel cried out for help to the Lord. When the people of Israel cried out to the Lord on account of the Midianites, the Lord sent a prophet to the people of Israel, and he said to them, Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, I led you up from Egypt and brought you out of the house of bondage, and I delivered you from the hand of the Egyptians and from the hand of all who oppressed you, and drove them out before you and gave you their land.

[ 1 : 26 ] And I said to you, I am the Lord your God. You shall not fear the gods of the Emirates and whose land you dwell, but you have not obeyed my voice.

Now the angel of the Lord came and said under the Terabinth at Ofra, which belonged to George the Abiyah's right, while his son Gideon was beating out weed in the wine press to hide it from the Midianites.

And the angel of the Lord appeared to him and said to him, The Lord is with you, O mighty man of Vala. And Gideon said to him, Please, sir, if the Lord is with us, why then has all this happened to us?

And where are all his wonderful deeds that our fathers recounted to us, saying, Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt? But now the Lord has forsaken us and given us into the hand of Midian. And the Lord turned to him and said, Go in this might of yours and save Israel from the hand of Midian. Do not I send you? And he said to him, Please Lord, how can I save Israel?

[ 2 : 27 ] Behold, my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house. And the Lord said to him, But I will be with you and you shall strike the Midianites as one man.

And he said to him, If now I have found favor in your eyes, then show me a sign that is you who speak with me. Please do not depart from me until I come to you and bring out my present and set it before you.

And he said, I will stay till you return. So Gideon went into his house and prepared a young goat and unleavened cakes from ephah of flour. The meat he put in a basket and the broth he put in a pot and brought them to him under the terribinth and presented them.

And the angel of God said to him, Take the meat and the unleavened cakes and put them on this rock and pour the broth over them. And he did so. Then the angel of the Lord reached out the tip of the staff that was in his hand and touched the meat and the unleavened cakes.

And fire sprang up from the rock and consumed the meat and the unleavened cakes. And the angel of the Lord vanished from his sight. Then Gideon perceived that he was the angel of the Lord.

[ 3 : 38 ] And Gideon said, Allas, O Lord God, for now I have seen the angel of the Lord face to face. But the Lord said to him, Peace be to you.

Do not fear, you shall not die. Then Gideon built an altar there to the Lord and called it the Lord's peace. To this day it still stands at Ofra, which belongs to the Abiyahs' rites.

That night the Lord said to him, Take your father's bull and the second bull, seven years old, and pull down the altar of Baal that your father has, and cut down the Asherah that is beside it, and build an altar to the Lord your God on the top of the stronghold here, with stones laid in due order. Then take the second bull and offer it as a burnt offering with the wood of the Asherah that you shall cut down. So Gideon took ten men of his servants and did as the Lord had told him. But because he was too afraid of his family and the man of the town to do it by day, he did it by night. When the man of the town rose early in the morning, behold, the altar of Baal was broken down, and the Asherah beside it was cut down, and the second bull was offered on the altar that had been built.

[ 4 : 52 ] And they said to one another, Who has done this thing? And after they had searched and inquired, they said, Gideon, the son of Joash, has done this thing.

Then the man of the town said to Joash, Bring out your son that he may die, for he has broken down the altar of Baal and cut down the Asherah beside it. But Joash said to all who stood against him, Will you contend for Baal, or will you save him?

Whoever contends for him shall be put to death by morning. If he is a God, let him contend for himself, because his altar has been broken down. Therefore, on that day, Gideon was called Jerubal.

That is to say, let Baal contend against him, because he broke down his altar. Now all the Midianites and the Amalekites and the people of the east came together, and they crossed the Jordan and encamped in the valley of Jezreel.

But the spirit of the Lord clothed Gideon, and he sounded the trumpet, and the Abir's rites were called out to follow him. And he sent messengers throughout all Manasseh, and they too were called out to follow him.

[ 6 : 00 ] And he sent messengers to Asher, Zabalon, and Naftali, and they went up to meet them. Then Gideon said to God, If you will save Israel by my hand, as you have said, Behold, I am laying a fleece of wool on the threshing floor.

If there is dew on the fleece alone, and it is dry on all the ground, then I shall know that you will save Israel by my hand, as you have said. And it was so. When he rose early next morning and squeezed the fleece, he wrung enough dew from the fleece to fill a bowl with water.

Then Gideon said to God, Let not your anger burn against me. Let me speak just once more. Please let me test just once more with the fleece.

Please let it be dry on the fleece only, and on all the ground let there be dew. And God did so that night. And it was dry on the fleece only, and on all the ground there was dew.

Amen, this is the word of God. We're carrying along in our series on the book of Judges tonight, and we'll briefly, before we celebrate the Lord's supper together, look at this passage and see what it has to say to us.

[ 7 : 10 ] This is about Gideon. He's the sixth judge, and we've said every week that in the cycle of judges, we're getting pictures and images over and over again of what God is up to in the whole of redemptive history.

And that's very true here, because this is a story that's all about grace. It's all about the grace of God. And when you ask, what is the grace of God? What is God's grace?

Very important word. Grace is not a thing. It's not something you touch or taste or anything like that. Grace is just God's love for us at exactly the points we don't deserve it.

That's God's grace. It's his disposition towards us. And here in this passage, like many other places, you learn that grace is multifaceted. So grace, God's grace, the way he expresses that love toward us, that do not deserve it, is in so many dimensions, so many aspects.

And there are four ways, I think, in this passage of God demonstrates grace. Four sides of grace, many more than that you could talk about. But let's just look at the four that are here.

[ 8 : 13 ] God is gracious. We learn in judgment. He's gracious in the fact that he confounds the strong. He's gracious in the fact that he gives us the gift of sacrifice or substitution.

And then finally, he's patient. So God's grace, so many dimensions, infinite amount. But let's just look at these four quickly and we'll celebrate the Lord's supper. First, God's gracious in how he judges.

There's real love in God's judgment. And that's not a popular thing to say in the modern world. But there is, and that's one of the things that the Book of Judges teaches you over and over again.

And in verse one, we read about that because the people of Israel are back in the cycle of idolatry. They do what's evil in the sight of the Lord. And because of their idolatry, curse and oppression comes on them from the Midianites.

And so for seven years, they're oppressed under the hand of Midian. Seven years we learn later, they're continuing to worship false gods, baals and asherah poles.

[ 9 : 16 ] These are images of wood and stone that they're continuing to worship. So seven years oppressed, seven years still stuck in the cycle of idolatry while they're being oppressed. And one of the interesting bits is that this is the most detailed account of an oppressor and how exactly an evil nation that's oppressing Israel does it.

All the little details, it's the most detailed account we have except for the Samson story. Exactly what Midian was up to and how they were crushing Israel. And Midian is one of the sons of Abraham. Abraham and the bondservant, the maidservant of Sarah, Ketura.

Midian is one of their sons. And so a whole people group come out of that relationship and then they're nomads, they're nomadic. We learn the Midianites here are moving across the lands, they'll leave, they'll come back.

Now, the way to understand what's happening here is to think about a bug's life. Have you ever seen a bug's life? It's a great movie. And a bug's life, remember if you've seen it, what happens is that the grasshoppers come every single year and they demand the ants flick and all of his companions to bring a tribute.

And so you got to, the ants work all year to get all these crops and the grasshoppers come once a year and they take every bit of it. And that's exactly the way the Midianites were oppressing Israel.

[ 10 : 41 ] So the Midianites would come about once or twice a year and all the work that Israel had done, they would just take it. And so it's that we're told here that Israel is living in caves, they're raising crops and then all of it's getting taken away.

We learned that in this passage Gideon is hiding the wheat that he's threshing on the threshing floor, trying to keep Midian from finding it because they're just going to take it.

And that's the condition there and it says the quote, Israel was very low, which is a Hebrew word for feeble, meaning physically they were starving. And one commentator says that Israel is living the life in this passage of eating rats in caves.

That's the kind of condition that the people are in, very poor, very weak, very feeble. Now the Lord comes to Gideon in verse 13 and Gideon says to God the question of the passage really and it's this.

He says, why Lord, if you are really with us and you've done all these great things for the people of our past, why are we in this position? Why are we suffering like this?

[ 11 : 48 ] And that's the question of the passage. It's such an important question. It's probably a question you've asked before. Lord, if you are for me, then why am I going through this right now?

It's a question that every single one of us faces at times. And one of the very important pieces of this passage is to say the nuance and the wisdom and understanding how suffering comes into our lives.

So if you read the book of Job, very quickly in Job, you learn that Job was not suffering, all the pain he went through and the loss he experienced, Job was not suffering for a specific sin he had committed.

And his friends are trying to tell him that, no, this is because you've been such a bad person. And the wisdom of the book of Job is, no, sometimes suffering comes into our lives and it has nothing to do with our behavior.

It's just the condition of the world we live in. It's a test. It could be any sort of thing. But one of the hard things that is very true that the book of Judges teaches you in this passage in particular is that sometimes suffering, oppression, does come as a result of our choices.

[ 12 : 56 ] Does come into our lives because of the things we've done. And that's exactly what's happening here. You know, Gideon says, why, Lord, if you really are for us, are we being oppressed? And he's ignoring the very visible thing that he and all of his friends are continuing to bow their heads before asherah pulls.

And the answer is that they chose idolatry and God gave them over to Midian. But this really is something that they brought into their lives. One writer says, in this passage, we learn that it's particularly important to see that God has built into the pattern of reality that sin, patterns of sin,

really do beget consequences.

And that the more we break the order of the world as God made it, the more it breaks us. That there, in other words, that there really is a law in order to this world.

And when you read the Ten Commandments, when you read the Sermon on the Mount and you see this law throughout the Bible, it's not there to be rules for the sake of rules, not at all. Instead, it's there to say there's an order of existence in which human beings really can flourish.

And when you push against that and you choose idolatry, the more you break and push against the order, the more it pushes back. The more it breaks you, the more sometimes that causes real consequences of suffering that come into your life.

[ 14 : 15 ] Life really is built on truth. And so we think about things like the Ten Commandments, honor the Sabbath. And that's not there for no reason, honor the Sabbath. Because if you work and work and work every day, seven days a week, it'll kill you. It'll crush you.

God's actually giving you something to say, the rules are there to provide life, not just to be rules for the sake of rules. We break God's order, it pushes back.

Sometimes that is very much the truth. And the way to respond to this is just to look at verse six. It says in verse six that in the midst of all this, the people of God were feeble and they cried out to the Lord.

And some of them recognized that the idolatry that they had chosen had broken their lives. And they cried out. And that really is the very simple answer.

You could be in a place tonight where there are ongoing patterns of sin in your life that are breaking you, that have caused real trouble.

[ 15 : 15 ] And we see here what to do. You cry out to the Lord. And Paul says in Corinthians that when you do that, you can either be doing it in a state of regret, or you can be doing it in a state of true repentance.

In a state of regret, you say, you know, I really hate the pain that this has brought into my life, the consequences. But in a state of true repentance, you say, I can see that God has really has made this world in a way that's ordered, in a way that I'm pushing back against the things he's made in a way that says, I need grace.

I need the help of the Lord, or I'm not going to be able to get out of this. That's the difference in regret and repentance. And what we learn here is that God really loves to answer that. So when you cry out, when you're in the pit of maybe decisions that have brought real consequences into your life, God loves to hear the cry that says, save me.

And he will. He'll come. And so that's what happens. Secondly, the angel of the Lord comes in. The second aspect of grace here is not only that there really is grace and judgment. Judgment sometimes, discipline is there to bring us back to the Lord.

But the second thing is that God loves to save us, and he loves to raise up a judge, a deliverer. And the way that he does that in this passage is with a principle.

[ 16 : 30 ] We could call it the Gideon principle. And the Gideon principle is that God loves to deliver us and make us into people who are not strong but weak.

You see, God loves to raise up the humble in order to confound the strong. And that's oftentimes how he does it throughout the Bible in many, many different ways. And so you can see, if you jump down to verse 15, when it comes to the life, when it comes to Gideon, the Lord is talking to Gideon, and he says, you in the power and strength that I've given you are going to deliver Israel.

And Gideon in verse 15 says, please, Lord, please, he says, please, sir, how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest, the weakest clan in Manasseh, which was one of the last tribes, one of the weakest tribes.

So he's saying, my clan is the weakest clan in the weakest tribe in Israel, and I'm least in my father's house. Now, there are, you think of David who would come later, you know, in other words, Gideon saying, you want me to do this.

And I'm from the weakest people group, the weakest little clan in the weakest tribe within Israel. And I'm the weakest in all my family. I'm at the very bottom of strength in the midst of all these people that you could have used to save.

[ 17 : 48 ] And it's just a simple principle, but it's there when God raises up delivers, he loves to take weakness to confound the strong. And it's all over the Bible. Now, here's where it really comes home.

Because when you realize who exactly it is that Gideon is speaking with, who exactly it is that Gideon is being called by, boy, then you really see the principle at work. Because if you look down at verse 14, verse 14, Gideon says to the one talking to him, sorry, it says, and the Lord turned to him and said, now the word Lord there in verse 14 and the Lord said to Gideon, is the divine name that we get from Exodus chapter three, the name Yahweh in the Old Testament.

It is God's holy name. And the reason that is so important is because this whole conversation between Gideon and this other person is Gideon speaking to what's called the angel of the Lord. And then you get down to verse 14 and it says, and the Lord said to Gideon, and just before that in verse 12, Gideon had called him, as Simon said, it's sir or master.

[ 18 : 59 ] He hadn't used the divine name to address him. He had used the lowercase I Lord. It's lowercase in your Bible. In other words, Gideon thinks that this is just some guy at first.

That's what Gideon thought. And then all of a sudden we're told in this conversation, but it was the Lord God himself speaking. And what we realize is that the angel of the Lord in this passage is God himself.

And the reason that Gideon doesn't see that is because the angel of the Lord has taken on a human like form. He's presenting himself in front of Gideon in a way that appears like a human being.

And so Gideon thinks this is some messenger of God, an angel perhaps taken on some type of form I can see. But no, the first 14 says this is the Lord speaking, the angel of the Lord is the Lord. And that means that the principle of Gideon is so important. This is grace at work because the angel of the Lord in this passage is the commander of the Lord's army. The army that will ultimately deliver Israel.

[ 20 : 05 ] This is the Son of God. The angel of the Lord is the Son of God. This is the one who will one day become Jesus. And he is standing there before Gideon in every power.

He is the commander of the army of the Lord, the angel of the Lord. Come to save Israel. And the principle of Gideon is God loves to save his people through weakness.

And that means that Gideon is staring at the one, the Son of God, who will one day, the commander of all of God's army, make himself absolutely nothing in order to save.

See, the principle is so at work in the man in front of Gideon's face because the angel of the Lord will become a human being in Jesus Christ. And he will become ultimately weak in order to save. He'll confound the strong and utter weakness at the cross. And it's right here. It's the principle of Gideon. God says, I will take the weakest of the weakest of the weakest and deliver my people.

[ 21 : 04 ] And it's the angel of the Lord that becomes weak, week, week, all the way to the bottom in order to deliver his people. God's grace, he loves to take what is weak and confound the strong. Now, when you experience that gospel, when you see that, all the more it gives you a possibility.

When you look at the Judge Redeemer, Jesus Christ himself, the true and better Gideon, it gives you the power over time as a Christian. When you experience that gospel to become a person that my, this phrase I first heard in seminary from our practical ministry class, the lecturer said, what Christianity offers is the ability for you to become humble and confident simultaneously.

You see, God loves to take what is weak, humility and confound strength. And he did it in Jesus. And then when you follow Jesus, you have the power and ability to more and more become like that, humble confidence, shockingly, shocking humility in the midst of a right side up world that promotes power at every turn, shocking humility, and yet utter strength at the same time.

You become more and more like Jesus, utterly humble and yet clothed in the warrior's armor of Ephesians six. Like Christ. This is exactly the message of Judges. God takes what is weak, humility, and he makes it strong.

The more you become humble, the stronger you become. The more humility you take on, the more you become a warrior for the Lord. You become like Jesus. You put on his armor all the more.

[ 22 : 35 ] It's humble confidence. It's something, it's an ethic. It's a way of life that only Christianity can really offer because it's bathed, it's soaked in the reality of the meaning of the cross.

Humble confidence, weakness, and power. Now thirdly, let me give you this Bonhoeffer quote.

Don't want to pass that over. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, this is what he says.

He says humility is when the Christian faith switches from talk to reality. Third, third of four. The third aspect of grace we see in this passage is that God's grace is so in display here because we

see another principle that's so important across the Bible that God loves to receive a substitute on our behalf for us.

Every single religion in all of world history has always included some component of sacrifice. Every single religion, and that's not to say that all the religions are the same.

I think it's to say something more like every single human being knows that they need to offer something in their place for what they've done. And so every religion has always included some element of sacrifice.

[ 23 : 43 ] Now Gideon says to God here, the angel of the Lord, the son of God, he says in verse 13, are you not the God who brought our ancestors out of Egypt?

And he says, and so if that's you, if you are so big and so powerful, why are we under the yoke of oppression like this? Now Gideon in that statement has entirely condemned himself and shown the truth about where his heart is.

Gideon's been living in a pagan world, in a pagan land, worshiping false gods, and he thinks mechanically about God. And he says, look, if you're our God, then why, and you're the strongest God, then why have you not saved us?

And he completely fails to see where his own sin is in all of this. His own idolatry is in all of this. And then in verse 23, after all these sacrifices take place, the angel of the Lord shows up to Gideon and Gideon says, it really is God, this is God.

And the angel of the Lord turns and says to Gideon, that's right, and you will not die today. Now, why does he say that? And he's saying, you know, Gideon, you showed up here and you said, why are you not doing your job?

[ 24 : 56 ] That's what Gideon said to the angel of the Lord. Lord, if you're so strong, why aren't you being strong for us? As if it was God's fault that they were in this predicament.

And that's why the angel of the Lord says, today you're not going to die. What's the implication? The implication is Gideon deserved to die in the presence of the Lord.

Gideon did not deserve the grace he had been given to even stand in the presence of the Lord. And the reason that he's able to is because God, the angel of the Lord does something really important, that's subtle and hard to catch.

And that's in verse 19, Gideon says, okay, I'm going to, this is an important person, I'm going to make you a meal. So Gideon goes and prepares this meal.

He wants to sit down. He wants to be a good host, show hospitality. And what happens? The angel of the Lord does not eat the meal like it's a meal. Instead, the angel of the Lord takes his staff and touches the meal like it's an altar.

[ 25 : 58 ] And the meal burns up. You see, Gideon thinks I'm hosting the angel of the Lord in a meal. And instead, the angel of the Lord flips it upside down and says, no, I'm receiving this as your sacrifice.

You see, the reason that Gideon is able to stand in front of the angel of the Lord is because the Lord takes Gideon's offer and fixes it. He makes it a sacrifice. He says, you need something in your place.

You need a substitute. You need a sacrifice to come and stand between me and you or otherwise you can't be here. You can't be in the presence of the Lord. There can be no life, Gideon, of you of true humility without being cleansed by God's atonement.

And this is exactly what happens. This is Old Testament justification that Gideon right then is being pronounced clean by a substitute in a way that he does not deserve it all.

It's justification by substitution. And it's not just about him because right after that in verse 25, then God, the Lord says, now you need to go do that for everybody else in Israel as well if they're going to be saved.

[ 27 : 08 ] And so they take two bulls. And one of those bulls is seven years old. How long has Israel been under the oppression of Midian? Seven years.

And how long has Israel continued to serve the idols, the Baals and the Asherahs? Seven years. And how old is the bull that's going to stand in the place of Israel? Seven years. And you see, God is saying, every single bit of idolatry that you committed under the Midianite oppression, I will forgive.

I will look at this substitute and I will stay justice. But there were two bulls. One seven years old, taking on representatives symbolically the sins of the people's idolatry, the other bull, it's implied,

went free.

This is just like the day of atonement in Leviticus 16, where it's saying, what's it saying? The day of atonement, one lamb takes on the sin of the people, the other goes free.

This day, one bull takes on the sin of the people, seven years full, the total, but another goes free. And the one that goes free is a sign. And it's a sign that says, lambs and bulls cannot take away your sin.

[ 28 : 21 ] It's a sign of waiting. This bull, this lamb has to go free in the wilderness until the one day that the true and better substitute would come once and for all and get rid of the sacrificial system.

You see, these bulls, this blood, this sacrifice, this substitute is all about pointing to the fact that the angel of the Lord himself will one day come and become the substitute.

It'll be his blood. He will take every bit of it. You know, I love that Jesus in the Gospels comes and says, do you know how many times God loves to forgive? Seven times seven times seven times seven times seven times seven times seven.

It's all in sevens. He says the bull is seven years old because your sin is sevenfold. It's full. That's the number of fullness. And he said, your sin is so complete, but the sacrifice will also be complete. And so I'll give you 70 times seven forgiveness. Now, thirdly and fourthly, and finally, God's grace is multifaceted. God's grace has dimensions that we will never reach the bottom of.

[ 29 : 26 ] God's grace has things that we don't know and will never understand, his love. And it's that he does indeed love us even through discipline and judgment. He does indeed love us by confounding the strong and raising up weak people, humble people.

And he loves us by accepting a substitute in our place. And then lastly, and this is so good, he loves us by being patient. And so at the very end of this passage, after Gideon had experienced all this in the front of the angel of the Lord, in verse 36, you know, God's called him.

He's raised up all these other tribes to come alongside him for an army to defeat Midian. And in verse 36, Gideon says, Lord, I still need you to show me that you're really for me.

And he says, so if you will save Israel by my hand, as you have said, will you please give me a sign? Now, God has done so much for him. And God has raised up an army, there's an army already encamped around him.

And he says, I just, I'm not sure. And he says, will you, will you please give me a sign? And the amazing thing about this is that God does it.

[ 30 : 41 ] This is completely unlike the mechanical gods that Gideon had worshiped, where, you know, you bring your tribute X and you say your magic incantation Y and you get rain.

That's the way he thought about it. But this God, the true God comes along and when he's in relationship with his man, his person, anybody, he says, you know what, you got fear, you got doubt in your life, you got struggle, your faith is really weak.

And I've got time for that. I've got patience for that. And so Gideon says, look, Lord, if you're really going to be for me, I want you to show me that by, I'm going to put a fleece out, wool.

And in the morning, when the morning dew comes, I want the fleece to be wet and the ground to be dry. And God does it. Wow. Nobody can do that but God, right?

And then Gideon says, okay, one more time, please one more time. And you say, he's still is weak in faith. He's still doubting. He's still fearful. He doesn't have strong faith.

[ 31 : 50 ] This is the man of God, the deliverer, Gideon. And he just doesn't. And so he says, now, can you reverse it? Then I'll really believe. And God says, okay, I'll reverse it.

And he does it. And you know, this is a once in a life, this is a once in redemptive history moment. We are not Gideon. God was delivering his people through Gideon to point to Jesus.

But I do want to say, it's important to say that God's grace is so multifaceted and God loves to show patience and love towards fearful people, towards doubting people.

He's patient. And the difference in what do you do with your doubts? What do you do with your fearfulness? What do you do when you say, I just don't know? You take it Godward.

You know, that's what Gideon did. He says, I'm not sure. Give me another sign, please. But you know what he was doing? He was taking it to God. Cast every single anxiety upon him because he cares for you. He wants to be patient with you.

[ 32 : 50 ] He wants to show you, don't bottle it up. Don't keep it in. Look, if you're here in this church and you're struggling, don't bottle it up. Let it out. Go talk to somebody.

Who in your life are you talking to right now about your fearfulness, about your doubts, about your struggles, about the concerns you have about a lack of growth, maybe? And right here we see that God loves that.

He loves to show patience. He loves to show patience to the doubting and the fearful. James chapter one. He did it for Gideon. He'll do it for every one of you. He loves to come and work in the midst of our weakness.

He came and Jesus Christ and said, I am for you all the way. And we're going to see that as we celebrate the supper tonight.

Let's pray. Lord, we thank you for multifaceted grace. We thank you that you are patient, that you love us enough to provide a substitute. We thank you that you love to take what is weak in this world and confound the strong.

[ 33 : 54 ] We love, Lord, that even in the midst of discipline and judgment that comes into our lives through our own choices, you still speak words of love. You draw us back. And so thank you. Thank you, God, for all the ways you're gracious.

We just pray now that as we come to celebrate the Lord's supper, we would see that and believe it and be encouraged and renewed. And we pray that now in Jesus' name. Amen.