

“Jesus, the Leaning Man”

Summary

This powerful message centers on a profound spiritual truth: we are not what the world needs—Jesus is. Drawing from Mark 4, where Jesus sleeps peacefully on a pillow during a violent storm, we discover the beauty of complete dependence on God. Jesus, though fully divine, chose to humble Himself and live in total reliance on the Father, never acting independently but always listening for divine instruction. His ability to rest in the storm wasn't about His own strength, but about His trust in the Father's plan. The message challenges us to stop imitating the culture's ideals of self-sufficiency and instead undergo a total transformation of how we think. We learn that God intentionally removes the props we lean on—our talents, our skills, our self-reliance—not to humiliate us, but to make room for a greater revelation of His strength. Like Jacob, who wrestled with God and walked away with a limp, our weaknesses become testimonies to God's power. The world has seen the best humanity has to offer and found it wanting. What creation desperately needs is to see redemption at work, to witness Jesus shining through surrendered vessels. When we embrace our dependence rather than graduate from it, we discover that our weaknesses no longer matter because it was never about us in the first place.

Small Group Study Guide – Jesus, the Leaning Man

Opening Prayer

Begin by asking God to help your group understand what it means to truly depend on Him, and to reveal areas where you might be relying on your own strength instead of His.

Ice Breaker

Share a time when you had to depend on someone else completely. How did that feel? Was it comfortable or uncomfortable?

Key Scripture

Mark 4:37-40 - The storm on the sea and Jesus sleeping on a pillow

Supporting Passages:

- Philippians 2:5-11
 - Galatians 3:2-3
 - Isaiah 41:8-20
 - Genesis 32:24-28 (Jacob wrestling with God)
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Key Takeaways

1. Jesus Modeled Complete Dependence

- Jesus was 100% God and 100% man
- He chose to operate in complete dependence on the Father
- He laid down His divine privileges to show us how to live
- If Jesus needed to depend on the Father, how much more do we?

2. We Cannot Graduate from Dependence

- We enter the Kingdom by grace through faith
- We continue the same way we entered—by depending on God
- Trying to maintain our spiritual life through our own strength is "foolish" (Galatians 3:3)
- Even in eternity, we remain dependent on God

3. God Uses Our Weakness to Display His Strength

- Jacob's hip injury became his permanent reminder to lean
- God called Israel "worm Jacob" then made him a "threshing instrument with teeth"
- Gideon's army was reduced from 32,000 to 300 to make room for God's glory
- Our weaknesses aren't disqualifications—they're opportunities for God to shine

4. The World Needs Jesus, Not Our Best Efforts

- People don't need our wisdom, strength, or skills
 - They need to see Jesus in us
 - When we get out of the way, Jesus can reach the broken (like the Gadarene demoniac)
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Discussion Questions

Understanding the Message

1. Pastor Zach shared his struggle with not being able to speak well when he first felt called to teach. Why do you think God sometimes calls us to things we're not naturally equipped to do?
2. Read Mark 4:38. The disciples asked Jesus, "Don't you care that we're perishing?" Have you ever felt this way during a crisis? What does Jesus sleeping on the pillow teach us about faith during storms?
3. What does it mean that Jesus "humbled himself within the Godhead" (Philippians 2:6-8)? How does this challenge our understanding of strength and power?

Personal Reflection

4. Pastor Zach said, "God will oftentimes knock out other stuff that you're propped up on." What are some things you might be "propped up on" besides Jesus? (Career success, financial security, relationships, reputation, abilities, etc.)
5. Jacob spent his whole life trying to manipulate circumstances through his own cleverness. In what areas of your life are you most tempted to rely on your own wisdom instead of God's?
6. "If it's not about me, then my weaknesses don't matter either." How does this perspective change the way you view your limitations or failures?

Going Deeper

7. The sermon mentioned that Jesus was tempted to:
 - Meet His own needs independently (turn stones to bread)
 - Require absolute proof (throw yourself down)
 - Overcome independently (bow to Satan for kingdoms)

Which of these temptations do you struggle with most? How does leaning on God address this temptation?

8. Read Isaiah 41:14-20. God transforms "worm Jacob" into a powerful instrument and changes impossible landscapes. What "impossible" situation in your life needs God's transforming power?
9. Pastor Zach said, "God is not interested in showing you off to the world. He's interested in making Jesus known." How does this truth affect your goals, ambitions, or how you measure success?

Application

10. What would it look like practically for you to "lean on Jesus" this week in a specific area where you've been relying on yourself?

11. The Gadarene demoniac met Jesus immediately after the disciples' storm experience. How might your current "storm" be preparing you to minister to someone else?
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Practical Applications

This Week's Challenge

Choose one of the following to practice this week:

Option 1: The Dependence Audit

- Each morning, identify one area where you typically rely on your own strength
- Consciously pray and surrender that area to God before taking action
- Journal what happens when you lead with dependence instead of self-reliance

Option 2: The Pillow Prayer

- Like Jesus sleeping on the pillow, practice resting in God's sovereignty
- When anxiety comes, physically lie down (if possible) and pray: "Into your hands I commit my spirit"
- Ask God to show you what He's teaching you through your current circumstances

Option 3: The Weakness Inventory

- List 3-5 weaknesses or limitations you're currently facing
- Instead of seeing them as problems, ask God: "How do You want to display Your strength through this?"
- Share your list with one trusted person and ask them to pray for you

Option 4: The Jacob Limp

- Identify one "Jacob moment" where God has humbled you or limited you
- Instead of resenting it, thank God for it
- Look for ways this limitation has made you more dependent on Him

Memory Verse

Philippians 2:5-7 - "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men."

Closing Reflection

Pastor Zach shared: "The only good thing I have is from Jesus."

Take a moment of silence for each person to honestly assess:

- What am I trying to offer people from my own resources?
 - Where do I need to "get out of the way" so Jesus can be seen?
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Closing Prayer

Pray together:

- Thank God for His willingness to meet us in our weakness
 - Ask for grace to lean completely on Him rather than our own understanding
 - Pray for opportunities to show Jesus (not ourselves) to a broken world
 - Thank Him that our weaknesses are not disqualifications but invitations to see His strength
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For Next Week

- Read Mark 5:1-20 (the Gadarene demoniac)
- Reflect on: What happens when Jesus steps out of the boat after a storm?
- Consider: Who in my life is "dwelling among the tombs" and needs to meet Jesus through me?

Main Points – Jesus, the Leaning Man

Sermon Summary:

This sermon explores the transformative power of complete dependence on Jesus Christ, using the account of Jesus sleeping in the storm as a foundation. Pastor Zach vulnerably shares his 25-year journey of learning that ministry effectiveness comes not from personal strength or eloquence, but from humble reliance on God. Through the examples of Jesus' own dependence on the Father, Jacob's wrestling with God, and Gideon's reduced army, the message emphasizes that God intentionally removes our self-sufficiency to make room for His glory. The central theological point is that believers enter the Christian life by grace and must continue by the same grace—not through human effort or wisdom. God is not interested in showcasing our abilities but in revealing Jesus through our weaknesses, transforming "worms" into "threshing instruments with teeth" that can impact a broken world desperate for redemption.

Key Points:

- Jesus modeled complete dependence on the Father despite being fully God, choosing to operate in human weakness and reliance on the Holy Spirit
- We receive salvation by grace through faith, and we must continue in the Christian life the same way—not by our own strength or works
- God often removes the props we lean on to force us into greater dependence on Him
- Our weaknesses become irrelevant when ministry is about Jesus rather than ourselves
- The world doesn't need our wisdom, strength, or skills—it needs to see Jesus through us
- God makes room for greater revelation of His strength by reducing our reliance on human ability
- Leaning on Jesus is not a last resort but should be our primary posture in life
- When we commune with Jesus and see Him for who He is, He transforms what is ugly in us

Scripture Reference:

- Mark 4:37-40 (Jesus calming the storm)
- Philippians 2:5-11 (Jesus' humility and exaltation)
- Galatians 3:2-3 (beginning and continuing by the Spirit)
- Isaiah 41:8-20 (God transforming the worm Jacob into a threshing instrument)
- Isaiah 42:1-6 (the servant whom God upholds)
- Genesis 32:24-28 (Jacob wrestling with God)
- Romans 12 (transformation of thinking)
- Psalm 147:10 (God delights in those who hope in His mercy)

Discussion Questions – Jesus, the Leaning Man

How does Jesus' complete dependence on the Father challenge our modern cultural emphasis on self-sufficiency and independence?

In what ways have you experienced God 'kicking out the legs' from underneath things you were propped up on, and how did that force you into greater dependence on Him?

Why do you think God chose to reduce Gideon's army from 32,000 to 300, and what does this reveal about how God displays His strength through our weakness?

The sermon describes Jacob's life as constantly trying to manipulate circumstances through his own wisdom and strength. What areas of your life might you be trying to control rather than surrendering to God?

How does understanding that Jesus humbled Himself within the Godhead and operated in complete dependence on the Father change your perspective on your own need for dependence?

What does it mean practically to 'get out of the way' so that people see Jesus rather than seeing us, especially in our work, families, and communities?

Pastor Zach mentions that if it's not about us, then our weaknesses don't matter either. How does this truth free you from the pressure to be perfect or sufficient in your own strength?

Why do you think Jesus rebuked the disciples for their fear in the storm when they were facing a genuinely life-threatening situation?

How does the transformation of Jacob from a manipulator into Israel, and from a worm into a threshing instrument with teeth, illustrate God's redemptive power in our own lives?

What would it look like in your daily life to consistently 'lean on Jesus' rather than treating dependence on Him as a last resort when everything else fails?

Scriptures – Jesus, the Leaning Man

Explicitly Mentioned References:

1. **Mark 4:37-40** - Jesus calms the storm, disciples wake him from sleeping on a pillow
2. **Romans 12** - Stop imitating the culture, be transformed by the Holy Spirit (referenced from Passion Translation)
3. **Psalms 147:10** - He delights not in the strength of a horse or legs of a man
4. **Philippians 2:5-11** - Let this mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus, who humbled himself
5. **Luke 4** - Jesus tempted in the wilderness (turning stones to bread, bowing to Satan, throwing himself down)
6. **Galatians 3:2** - Received the Spirit by works or by hearing of faith
7. **Isaiah 42:1, 6** - Behold my servant whom I uphold; bruised reed he will not break
8. **Genesis 32:10** - Jacob's reference to passing over Jordan with his staff
9. **Genesis 28** - Jacob's vision of the ladder
10. **John 1:51** - Angels ascending and descending on the Son of Man (implied reference)
11. **Genesis 32:24-28** - Jacob wrestling with the angel, name changed to Israel
12. **Isaiah 41:8-10, 14-15, 18-20** - Fear not, O worm Jacob; making him a threshing instrument; transforming the wilderness
13. **Judges 7** - Gideon's army reduced from 32,000 to 22,000 to 10,000 to 300
14. **Mark 5:1-2, 5** - The Gadarene demoniac who lived among tombs

Additional Implied References:

15. **Matthew 26:39** - "Not my will but thine be done" (Gethsemane)
16. **Luke 23:46** - "Into your hands I commend my spirit"
17. **Matthew 5:5** - "Blessed are the meek"
18. **Luke 15:10** - Joy in the presence of angels over one sinner who repents
19. **Song of Solomon 8:5** - The bride coming up from the wilderness leaning on her beloved
20. **2 Corinthians 12:9** - "My strength is made perfect in weakness" (implied theme)

Devotional – Jesus, the Leaning Man

5-Day Devotional: Learning to Lean

Day 1: The Strength of Dependence

Reading: Philippians 2:5-11

Devotional: Jesus, being fully God, chose to humble Himself and become completely dependent on the Father. This wasn't weakness—it was the pathway to ultimate exaltation. Consider how Jesus never acted independently but only did what He saw the Father doing. He spent hours in prayer, seeking direction and strength. Today, we're tempted to believe that self-sufficiency is a virtue, that we must prove our worth through our own abilities. But Jesus modeled something revolutionary: strength through surrender. When we stop relying on our own understanding and lean entirely on God, we position ourselves for His power to work through us. Your weaknesses aren't disqualifications—they're invitations for God's strength to be displayed.

Reflection: What areas of your life are you still trying to control independently rather than surrendering to God?

Day 2: Sleeping Through the Storm

Reading: Mark 4:35-41

Devotional: Jesus slept peacefully while the storm raged because He knew His purpose and trusted the Father completely. The disciples panicked because they were relying on their own abilities to survive. Notice that Jesus didn't rebuke the storm first—He rebuked their lack of faith. He was teaching them that peace isn't found in calm circumstances but in trusting God's character and promises. When storms hit your life—financial pressure, health concerns, relational turmoil—where do you turn first? Jesus invites you to bring your own pillow to the storm, to rest in His sovereignty even when waves are crashing. His question to you today is the same: "Why are you so fearful? Where is your faith?" True faith doesn't eliminate storms; it allows you to rest through them.

Reflection: What "storm" are you currently facing, and how can you practice resting in God's presence today?

Day 3: From Worm to Warrior

Reading: Isaiah 41:8-20

Devotional: God called Jacob a "worm" and then promised to make him a "threshing instrument having teeth." This isn't an insult—it's a revelation of how God works. A worm has no strength, no legs, no defense mechanism. It's completely vulnerable and dependent. Yet God specializes in taking the weak and powerless and transforming them into mighty instruments for His glory. He does this intentionally so that when transformation happens, everyone knows it wasn't human effort but divine power. God isn't interested in showcasing your natural talents; He wants to display His redemptive power through your surrendered life. When you feel inadequate or insufficient, remember: that's exactly the position God uses most powerfully. Your weakness is the canvas on which He paints His strength.

Reflection: How has God used your weaknesses to display His strength in the past?

Day 4: The Gospel of Grace, Not Performance

Reading: Galatians 3:1-5

Devotional: Paul asks a piercing question: Did you receive the Spirit by your own works or by believing what you heard? The answer is obvious—by faith alone. Yet somehow, we slip into thinking we must now maintain our salvation through performance, effort, and self-improvement. Paul calls this "foolish"—a perverted gospel. You didn't earn your way into God's family, and you can't earn your way to spiritual maturity. The same grace that saved you is the grace that sustains you daily. This doesn't mean passivity; it means dependence. It means waking up each morning and acknowledging, "I need Jesus today just as much as the day I first believed." Stop trying to impress God with your strength and start leaning into His. Ministry flows from intimacy, not obligation.

Reflection: In what ways have you been trying to "earn" God's approval rather than resting in His grace?

Day 5: Making Room for His Glory

Reading: Judges 7:1-8

Devotional: God reduced Gideon's army from 32,000 to 300—not to build a stronger force, but to make room for a greater revelation of His power. He said, "You have too many people, lest Israel claim the victory came from their own strength." God hasn't changed. He still whittles down our self-reliance, removes our props, and strips away our safety nets—not to harm us, but to reveal Himself. When God knocks out what you've been leaning on, He's making space for you to experience Him in ways you never could when you were self-sufficient. The world doesn't need to see another talented, capable person. It needs to see Jesus. And Jesus shines brightest through people who know they have nothing to offer except Him. Let God reduce you so He can reveal Himself through you.

Reflection: What "props" might God be removing from your life to increase your dependence on Him?

Closing Prayer: Lord, teach us to lean. Help us embrace our weaknesses as opportunities for Your strength to be displayed. Transform us from self-reliant strivers into Spirit-dependent vessels. May the world see less of us and more of You. In Jesus' name, Amen.