

(Not a Fan by Kyle Idleman)

If you got to choose between a Tempur-Pedic® mattress and a box-spring, what would you choose? What about having to choose between your favorite pair of tennis shoes and some wooden clogs? If you could choose between a weekend at a spa clinic and a weekend camping in the desert at the hottest time of the year, what would you choose?

I know, I know, these are all pretty loaded questions. But their common denominator is what? Comfort. All told, our society places pretty high value on comfort. There's a lot of money to be made on products that enhance people's comfort. Memory foam for your bed, Lazy-boys for your living room, body pillows, Snuggies, and we even found a way to turn steel into wool for the kitchen.

On top of that, there are TV shows that exploit our love of comfort. Ever heard of the show *Dirty Jobs*? It's a show that goes around and documents some of the world's filthiest, most uncomfortable jobs. And we sit on our cushioned couches, laughing or wincing, all the while grateful we don't have to work that job.

But there's a danger in loving comfort too much, and I don't just mean putting on extra pounds. See, it seems that as we've continued to put more and more of an emphasis on being comfortable, our faith has followed suit. We've become Christians used to comfort. We come to our buildings that are warm in the winter and air conditioned in the summer. Our pews and chairs are padded. Even our Bibles are mostly soft, leather bound books, easy on the hands. And before you know it, it's not just the pews that are padded. The messages are padded with easy teaching. The doctrine becomes lifeless and leathery, and eventually the message of the Messiah becomes moral code mush.

In Luke 9:23, Jesus says, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me."

So what do comfort-craving fans do with something like the cross? I mean, it's pretty hard to avoid the cross when you're a Christian, right? What can you do with a phrase like, "take up your cross"? What I've found is that fans eventually find a way to even make the cross comfortable. They create a comfortable idea of the cross and what it means for us today to take up our crosses. So the phrase, "We all have our crosses to bear" gets thrown around loosely, referring to even the most menial or everyday tasks and inconveniences.

And the cross gets pushed to the back of our sermons and Bible studies, only making its annual appearance at Easter. And even though it's on our churches, our t-shirts,

and around
our necks, we end up with a comfortable cross.

But what else are we supposed to do, right? The cross is a tough sell. It's bad enough that Jesus had to die on the cross, but why did He have to go and insist we all end up with our own crosses? Isn't that kind of ruining Christianity's hope for decent public relations? Doesn't the cross hinder our ability to recruit new people? You're supposed to put your best foot forward, right? And don't we want more people to come to Jesus? That's supposed to be the point, isn't it? Having more people come to Jesus. So we try our best to make Christianity sound as appealing as possible, but what have we sacrificed in return?

[Daughter clip with Kyle on pp. 70-71 starting with "Sometimes in an effort..." and ending on "...or I'll send you packing."]

In First Corinthians chapter 1 Paul talks about how the world sees the cross – in verse 18 he writes, "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to those who are being saved it is the power of God."

For those living in the first century the cross was the ultimate symbol of weakness.

For many, then and now, the message of the Gospel – that God came to earth in the form of man and was crucified – is complete foolishness.

I mean why would God use a symbol of torture, of death, of weakness to save the world?

I suppose the idea of the cross seems more appealing to us because it's no longer used to

execute people and we've dressed it up. We are used to seeing the cross as an ornament,

decoration or a piece of jewelry. But if a First Century Jew came in and saw an illuminated cross hanging from our walls – they would think we were sick.

Imagine people walking around with a guillotine hanging around their neck or an electric chair dangling from their ears. For the Jews the cross meant weakness.

And I think that's God's point. That's what makes the cross so beautiful. God takes what from a human perspective is foolish. He chooses what has no glory and carries no honor. He finds the least likely symbol for love and life and says, "I'll use that."

God takes what the world says is foolish, demeaning, and shameful, and says "Watch this" and turns it into the power of salvation.

First Corinthians 1:18 says that he turns the foolishness of the cross into the power of salvation. Look down at verse 22 "Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks

look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles...For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength."

*Who else but God could take a cross that represented defeat –
and turn it into a symbol of victory?*

*Who else but God could take a cross that represented guilt –
and turn it into the symbol for grace?*

*Who else but God could take a cross that represented condemnation –
and turn it into a symbol of freedom?*

*Who else but God could take a cross that represented pain and suffering –
and turn it into symbol of healing and hope?*

*Who else but God could take a cross that represented death –
and turn it into a symbol of life?*

No one else could but he can. What seems like the ultimate moment of God's weakness was in reality the ultimate moment of God's strength. Here's why that matters. Here's what I don't want you to miss. This is our one point for this lesson, and it's so important, it's the only thing you need to get from this morning.

What God Did For the Cross, He Can Do for You.

That's when you are the weakest – you are exactly where you need to be for God to be the strongest. The upside down truth of the cross is that when you are weak – you are strong. Look at verse 27...***But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.*** It's not that God used the cross in spite of its weakness – he chose the cross because of its weakness.

Paul says that God chooses the weak things. Throughout Scripture God would continually choose the weak over the strong. I came across some examples of that: Abraham was old, Jacob was insecure, Leah was unattractive, Joseph was humiliated, Moses stuttered, Gideon was poor, Samson was proud, Rahab was immoral, David had an affair, Elijah was suicidal, Jeremiah was depressed, Jonah was disobedient, Naomi was a widow, John the Baptist was eccentric to say the least, Peter was impulsive & hot-tempered, Martha worried a lot, the Samaritan woman had several failed marriages, Zacchaeus was unpopular, Thomas had doubts, Paul had poor health, & Timothy was timid. The Bible is a long list of imperfect misfits who discovered that weakness is strength. So, God, do for us what you did for the cross.

Though it seems backward to us, God teaches us that when we think we're strong we're really weak – but when we acknowledge our weakness and humble ourselves before the Lord we put ourselves in a position to receive His strength. Paul talks more about this truth in his second letter to the Corinthians. In chapter 12 verses 9-10 “I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in...For when I am weak, then I am strong.”

Paul says I delight in my weakness – because when I am weak, then I am strong. Now I don't know anyone who naturally delights in their weakness. In fact most of us go to great lengths to disguise our weaknesses. Like when you're on a job interview and they ask the dreaded question, “What’s your greatest weakness?” How do you answer that? Well I tell what you don't do – you don't tell them your weakness – because if you do, they aren't going to hire you. You don't say “I'm never on time – I constantly procrastinate – I have trouble getting along with coworkers – I am not sure how to turn on computer.” You don't say that. But you have to say something. What do you say? Well you try to come up with a weakness that sounds more like a strength – I can be a little bit of a perfectionist. Or you say – I tend to be a bit of a workaholic. Why do we do that? Because in our world – in our economy – weakness isn't strength – strength is strength. There some 2000 self-help books published every year that communicate one message – you can do it. You have what it takes. Look deep and find the strength within yourself. But Paul says strength comes when we realize our weakness.

When we were traveling over spring break my son had packed some toys and books into a back pack and insisted on hauling that thing around himself. I volunteered several times to carry it for him. But he wanted to do it himself. It was clear that he wanted us to notice and point out how strong he was. We came to that conclusion when he would say to us repeatedly “look how strong I am.” But on one occasion we parked in a hotel parking lot late at night and we weren't very close to the entrance. I knew Kael was tired and he started off strong but soon was struggling. With a heavy sigh he stopped and he didn't really say anything...he just turned and looked at me and dropped his backpack on the ground... I picked it up and put it over my shoulder. We walked a few more steps and he stopped again...another heavy sigh...this time he reached up and I scooped him

up in my arm.

Happy to carry not only my son's weight but to also carry him.

I want to learn a lesson from my son – I want to admit my weakness – I want to ask God

to show his strength in my life. To do for me what he did for the cross. It's part of my pride

that I want to carry my own load – and I refuse to admit my weakness. But the cross makes

it clear that when I am weak – He is strong.

And that's a test for followers. Will you, like Christ did before us, trust God enough to

let your weakness be His strength? Because it's when we let go of our need for comfort,

our need to be in control, our need to glory in our strengths or accomplishments or our paycheck or our trophies or our co-workers' approval or whatever it is that keeps you from abandoning a comfortable version of the cross—it's then that God does in our lives what he

did in Christ's death. It's then that God does in our hearts what He did for the cross. And He takes followers who were hanging by a thread and bolsters their spirits. He takes followers who were at their weakest moment and uses it for

enormous kingdom good. He takes followers who are all but defeated and He turns their testimonies into life-giving messages of truth and hope, all to His glory.

Do for us what you did for the Cross. Do for us what you did for the Cross. Do for me,

do for this church, do for this city, do for this nation, do for this world what you did for the Cross, that we might begin to understand why you chose such an uncomfortable means of self-sacrifice. Do for us what you did for the Cross.