

Why doesn't God remove our weaknesses?

Losing much of my hearing led me to discover American Sign Language lessons on YouTube. I particularly enjoyed a video by a deaf young man who, in the course of the teaching, expressed his faith in Jesus Christ.

I was intrigued by one of the comments below the video. A young man blasphemed God with the vilest language, using a shallow-minded ploy: *If God were a good God, then why did he make the teacher deaf in the first place?*

It was obvious he didn't want an answer. He was looking for justification for his own corruption by accusing. Nevertheless, the question is provocative, contains a trace of validity, and uncomfortable for Christians to answer.

If that young man were present, I would be inclined to reply in a way he might not expect. I would make the question even more uncomfortable for Christians with this verse:

Then the LORD said to him, "Who has made man's mouth? Who makes him mute, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the LORD?" Exodus 4:11

Notice that God takes full responsibility for the afflictions of such people, offering no apology or explanation.

As though that were not annoying enough, it gets even stranger from here. To whom was God speaking?

It was Moses! God was calling him to go back to Egypt to speak to Pharaoh in order to rescue the Jewish people from slavery. Moses objected on the grounds that he had a speech defect. The original Hebrew is ambiguous and does not clarify what it was the defect, though some scholars suggest it may have been stuttering.

Worse, Moses had fled from Egypt because he had killed an Egyptian in a fight. Here we see God calling a stuttering murderer to be a prophet and bring justice to his people in a land from which he had fled. It's no wonder Moses objected!

We can imagine him wondering if God had confused him with someone else. But God promised to be *with his mouth* and called his brother Aaron to be a spokesman between Moses and Pharaoh, as well as Moses and the people.

Why doesn't God simply remove the weakness?

Perhaps we could ask: *If God were really good and loved Moses, why didn't he just heal him, make him eloquent, and send him back to Egypt as a genuine action hero?* But God did not do that. He sent Moses back as he was.

Surprise! God turned out to be right! Through Moses, God brought the ten plagues of judgment on Egypt, liberated hundreds of thousands from slavery, gave the Ten Commandments at Mt. Sinai, and inspired the writing of the first five books of the Bible, embedding a divine code of ethics into the bedrock of human history. All this through a stuttering murderer in the desert who did not want to do any of it in the first place.

As far as we know, Moses never did get healed of his speech defect. We might as well refrain from asking why, because God seems disinclined to answer. Perhaps God knew that an eloquent Moses would get more credit than he should.

How ironic! Is it possible that irony may be a tool in God's repertoire for expressing his faithfulness?

God's faithfulness through Moses

From our own vantage point in history, we see a bigger picture that Moses grasped only later. Five hundred years before, God had made a promise to an ancestor named Abraham. He promised that Abraham would be the father of a great people who would inherit Canaan, the Promised Land. Moses was one of those descendants.

God's call to Moses was the beginning of the fulfillment of that promise—the greatest display of divine faithfulness seen by mankind up to that time.

God's grace in Paul's weakness

A similar irony appears in the New Testament — the apostle Paul, not much better than Moses. Before he became a Christian, Paul participated in the violent persecution of the church. God later used him as an apostle through whom extraordinary miracles of healing took place.

Yet Paul had an affliction, and we do not know what it was. We have clues it may have involved his eyes. He prayed fervently three times for God to remove it. God declined and said, *"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."* The remarkable miracles of healing done through this man are documented in the Book of Acts.

How ironic that among the apostles, Paul was the only one with an affliction!

God showed Paul a striking truth: human affliction does not limit ministry but rather amplifies it, enabling people to achieve far more through their suffering than they ever could without it. It may annoy us to hear this, but we need to hear it: grace is more important than affliction. It is grace in spite of weakness that God uses to bless others.

Looking at it from this perspective, we see the tables turned on God's critics. This question could be asked of the young self-righteous person commenting on YouTube: *Given God's proven faithfulness and inherent goodness, what makes you think you can judge him in matters where you cannot see the final outcome?*

God knew the end from the beginning in the lives of Moses and Paul. We know nothing of God's plans for the life of that deaf Christian sign language teacher. But then, is it our business to know that? Or is it our business to trust God's faithfulness in things of which we know little of the beginning and nothing of the end?