



## Power from Weakness

If you were to meet my friend, Fred Smith, you probably wouldn't notice that he has a withered hand. The reason you wouldn't notice is because Fred doesn't call attention to it, and while Fred is a lot of things, one of the things he is not is a whiner and a victim.

If you did notice the withered hand, you would quickly forget it because Fred doesn't use his withered hand as an excuse for anything.

Charles Sykes, in *A Nation of Victims: The Decay of the American Character* (St. Martin's Press), says:

"Something extraordinary is happening in American society. Crisscrossed by invisible trip wires of emotional, racial, sexual and psychological grievance, American life is increasingly characterized by the plaintive insistence, *I am a victim*.

"The victimization of America is remarkably egalitarian. From the addicts of the South Bronx to the self-styled emotional road-kills of Manhattan's Upper East Side, the mantra of the victims is the same: *I am not responsible; it's not my fault*.

"Paradoxically, this don't-blame-me permissiveness is applied only to the self, not to others; it is compatible with an ideological Puritanism that is notable for its shrill demands of psychological, political and linguistic correctness.

"The ethos of victimization has an endless capacity not only for exculpating one's self from blame, washing away responsibility in a torrent of explanation—racism, sexism, rotten parents, addiction and illness—but also for projecting guilt onto others."

I agree with Sykes, but frankly, I would make an exception of those who deal with a genuine physiological or psychological struggle over which

they have no control. That would constitute, it seems to me, some "blank checks" in a number of areas. (I have tried to use ugliness myself, but have been told: "That dog won't hunt").

I would make some excuses for Fred because of his withered hand. But do you know something? He simply wouldn't allow it.

In fact, if you even suggested that you would cut some slack for Fred because of his hand, he would be so angry that he could spit on the grass, and the grass would wither. Fred absolutely will not allow himself to be a victim.

Fred told me the other day that when he was a boy he couldn't fight, so he learned to talk. If you have ever heard Fred give a speech, counter an adversary in an argument or explain a position, you know that he can talk. And, in that sense, his physical struggle became a very important gift to him.

When Paul complained to God about his "thorn in [the] flesh," God told Paul, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:7, 9).

A few weeks ago, I attended a faculty retreat near Atlanta. I don't like faculty meetings (if I get to heaven and God calls a meeting, I've missed it!), and a faculty retreat is sort of like a three-day extended faculty meeting.

I was not looking forward to it. I prayed about it, telling God that I did not want to go and asking him to give me the flu or something.

*Do you want to know why you don't want to go to the faculty retreat?*

Because I don't like meetings?

No, that's what you tell people.

Okay, what's the real reason?

*The reason you don't like faculty retreats is that you feel intimidated. You ran*

he asked me...

away from kindergarten, and whenever you are around guys whose degrees are longer than your arm, you do the "portable foxhole" thing and start talking about not liking meetings.

That isn't very flattering.

I didn't mean for it to be.

But it's okay.

I'm still quite fond of you, but you need to practice what you preach.

If you would see your "weakness" as an asset, you might not be so "up-tight" about going to the retreat. In fact, you might even enjoy it.

**When Paul complained to God about his "thorn in [the] flesh," God told Paul, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:7, 9).**

To make a long story short, I went to the retreat and, frankly, had a very good time.

I'm not going into the painful details about what changed my feelings—I've already told you more than I meant to—but, briefly, I discovered that I had a contribution to make for no other reason than the fact that I didn't have a lot of degrees.

I don't know what your "withered hand" is, but I suspect you have one.

It might be a difficult marriage, a besetting sin, a physical problem, a difficult financial situation, a sense of inferiority, a lack of physical prowess, etc.

Whatever it is...accept it as a fact and not as a problem, remember that God is sovereign and that he loves you, give it to him, and then get moving with what you've got to where he sends you.

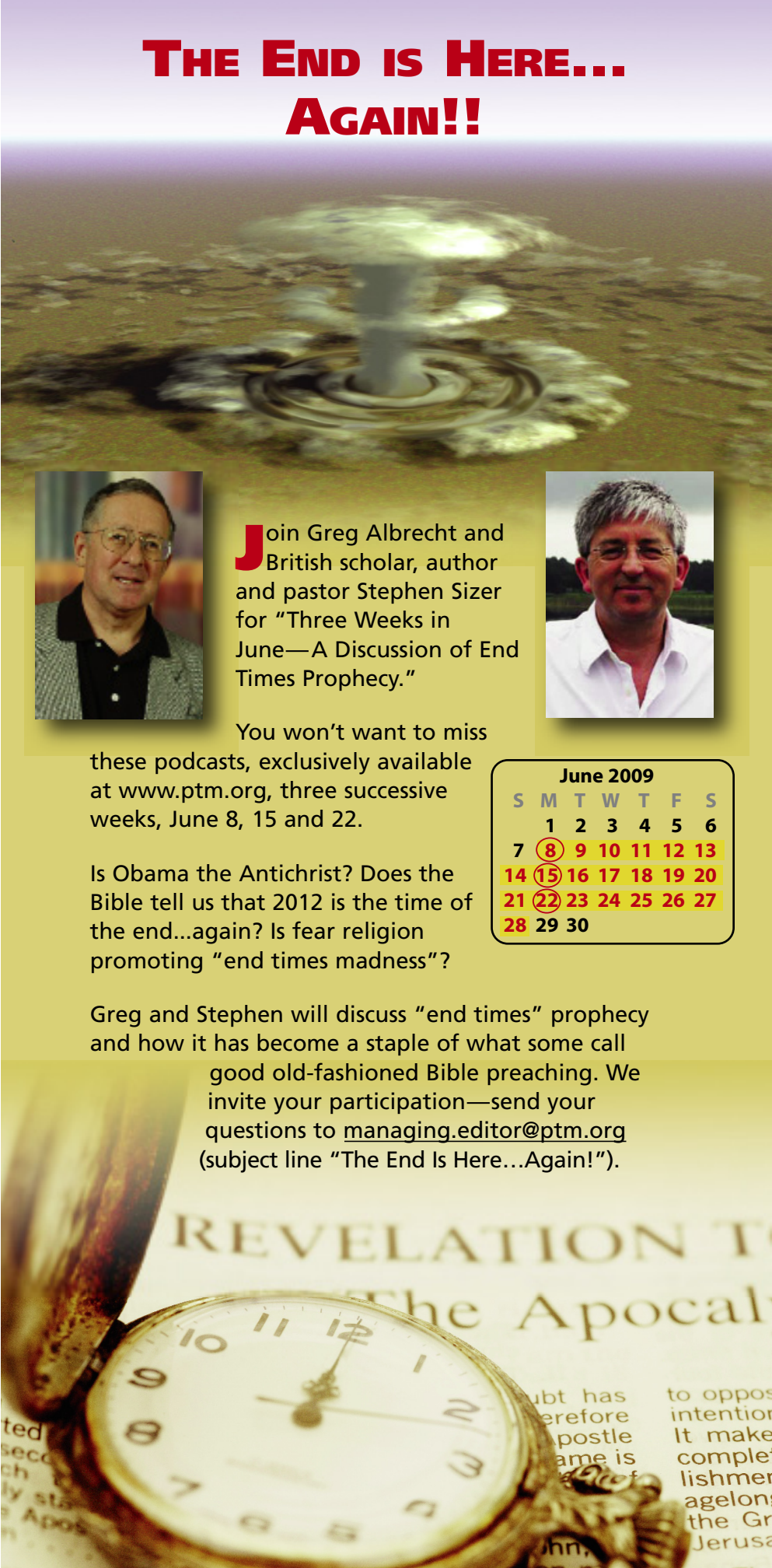
It is precisely because of—not in spite of—the withered hand that you will find a surprising and limitless source of power.

He asked me to remind you. □

—Steve Brown

MAY/JUNE 2009

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