SCRIPTURE:
...because of these surpassingly great revelations. Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore 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 delighted in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Cor. 12:7–10, NIV)

Same verses from The Message translation:
Because of the extravagance of those revelations, and so I wouldn't get a big head, I was given the gift of a handicap to keep me in constant touch with my limitations. Satan's angel did his best to get me down; what he in fact did was push me to my knees. No danger then of walking around high and mighty! At first I didn't think of it as a gift, and begged God to remove it. Three times I did that, and then he told me,

My grace is enough; it's all you need.
My strength comes into its own in your weakness.

Once I heard that, I was glad to let it happen. I quit focusing on the handicap and began appreciating the gift. It was a case of Christ's strength moving in on my weakness. Now I take limitations in stride, and with good cheer, these limitations that cut me down to size — abuse, accidents, opposition, bad breaks. I just let Christ take over! And so the weaker I get, the stronger I become.

MEDITATION:
In the book Transforming Fellowship, 19 Brain Skills That Build Joyful Community by Chris M. Coursey, we find a helpful catalogue of the emotional maturity skills that hopefully develop in the typical stages of life from infancy to eldership.* We learn that the capacity to stay true to our values under extreme pressure (as Jesus did on the cross) only grows as we mature within life-giving joyful community. Joy is defined as "glad to see you." When someone is genuinely glad to see you, your brain can heal and progress beyond the two basic questions of the limbic brain system: "Am I alone?"; "Is this good, bad, or scary?" Gentle protector skills are needed for the multi-generational joyful community in which weakness is welcomed.** That is the only way we absorb that being human is not a character defect.***

*Coursey, Chris M. Transforming Fellowship, 19 Brain Skills That Build Joyful Community, (Holland, MI: THRIVEtoday, 2016).
***For additional help in developing life-giving community, see Peter Scazzero, Emotionally Healthy Spirituality: It's Impossible to be Spiritually Mature While Remaining Emotionally Immature (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan 2017).

REFLECTION:
Part of maturing is coming to acceptance of my God-given limitations and calling in life. God is pleased with how he designed me, with both what the world calls handicaps and what the world calls strengths. He never asks me to be more or less than the earthen vessel he designed. Clues to my limitations and purpose come with increasing awareness of what energizes and delights me as well as of what drains and burns me out.
For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ. But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. (2 Cor. 4:6–7, NIV)

I have come to believe that I glorify God best when I let less be more: staying in my sphere where I can truly say his yoke is easy and his burden is light because his yoke is perfectly designed for me to keep in step with him. Farmers used to custom fashion the yoke for each ox and adjust it as they matured so it would not chafe. In the same way, God patiently fashions his yoke for me again and again as I mature.

I am so powerless to change myself; that is part one of step 1 in working the 12-step program, whether the addiction is to pleasing people or to various ways to fill the emptiness inside and soothe the heart in pain with artificial ease and comfort. The message of Galatians is that we cannot begin by the power of the Holy Spirit and finish anything by legalistic striving. God conforms/transforms us into the image of his Son Jesus when we rest in our powerlessness and limitations as we trust him and his power working in and through us.

Questions for Reflection:
1. What does it mean to become more true to the self God created me to become?
2. How is God using the pressures in my life to build my capacity to stay true to my values for loving well when I am under pressure?

PRAYER:
Abba Father, please continue to show me the way you designed my capacities and limitations. Holy Spirit, thank You for Your infinite patience as you heal my inner wounds and transform me into Jesus's image. Lord Jesus, I want to accept your grace more fully so I can keep in step with you in the yoke you designed just for me. Please let me fully glorify you by the life you planned just for me. Amen.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:
Grace Buchanan is a retired teacher of adult literacy volunteers, reading specialist, learning disabilities consultant, and teacher of children and teens in history, reading, English, Bible, and piano. She has been active in receiving and giving inner healing through various prayer ministries following graduate work in Christian counseling. Now she parents and grandparents, keeps up 12-step recovery work through meetings and sponsoring, and enjoys cycling and raising flowers and homemaking. She and her husband J. Scott Buchanan are members of Truro Anglican Church in Fairfax, VA.