

070724 "My Grace is Sufficient to You" 2 Corinthians 12:7-10

Today we delve into a powerful passage from Paul's second letter to the Corinthians. In these verses, Paul reveals a profound spiritual truth: God's strength is perfected in our weakness. This counterintuitive message challenges our natural inclinations but offers profound hope and encouragement.

Paul speaks of a "thorn in the flesh," a persistent trial or affliction that he faced. Paul did exactly what he told others to do in a time of trouble. Paul believed for himself what he wrote in Philippians 4:6, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God."

In fact, Paul repeatedly prayed about this thorn in the flesh. We might imagine that when the thorn in the flesh first appeared Paul thought, "This is not a problem. I'll just give it to the Lord in prayer." But nothing happened when he prayed. So he thought, "This is a tough one," and prayed again. When nothing happened after praying the third time, he knew God was trying to tell him something.

Some people think that Paul is using a Hebrew figure of speech that really means much more than three times. "That does not mean three times. It is the Hebrew figure for ceaselessly, continuously, over and over again."

By the way, what exactly was Paul's thorn in the flesh? We simply don't have enough information to say precisely, but that hasn't prevented many commentators and biblical scholars from giving their opinion.

Some see it mainly as spiritual harassment. Others think it was persecution. Many suggest that it was a physical or mental ailment. Among Christians, Tertullian gives the earliest recorded guess at the exact nature of Paul's problem. He thought the thorn in the flesh was an earache or a headache.

In more modern times, historian Sir William Ramsay offered the suggestion

that Paul's infirmity was a type of malaria common to the area where he served as a missionary. Sufferers of this type of malaria experience attacks when under stress, and they "feel a contempt and loathing for self, and believe that others feel equal contempt and loathing." This malarial fever also produces severe headaches.

Despite pleading with the Lord three times or many times for its removal, God chose not to take it away. Instead, God provided a different response: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

This teaches us that sometimes, our prayers for relief are not answered in the way we expect. Instead of removing the source of our pain or struggle, God may choose to leave it in our lives to fulfill a greater purpose. This thorn keeps Paul humble and reliant on God, preventing him from becoming conceited due to the great revelations he received.

Even in the 2,000-year history of Christianity, there were many cases where people who had special spiritual experiences became arrogant and fell because of them. Special spiritual experiences are precious, but it is human nature that makes it easy to become arrogant. When people become arrogant, they do not seek God but want to become God themselves.

Paul's response to his thorn, however, is remarkable. He doesn't respond with bitterness or despair. Instead, he embraces his weakness and even boasts about it. This seems paradoxical, but Paul has learned that his weaknesses create space for God's power to operate in his life. When we acknowledge our limitations, we open ourselves up to God's unlimited strength.

In our culture, we often celebrate strength, self-sufficiency, and independence. However, Paul's example encourages us to adopt a different perspective. When we are weak, we can fully rely on Christ's power, which is far greater than our own. Our weaknesses become opportunities for God's grace to shine through.

In Christianity, the paradox of servant leadership teaches us that true strength is found in humility and service to others. Jesus exemplified this when He washed His disciples' feet and ultimately sacrificed Himself on the cross. Paul's testimony about his "thorn in the flesh" echoes this paradox, showing us that our weaknesses are not liabilities but opportunities for God's power to be revealed. When we lead through serving and embrace our vulnerabilities, we make space for God's strength to work through us, transforming our lives and the lives of those around us.

I really like this part recorded in verse 9: "but he said to me." You see, God had a response for Paul. The answer was not what Paul initially hoped for or expected, but God still had a response for Paul. We often close our ears to God if He responds in a way we did not hope for or expect.

"My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Instead of removing the thorn from Paul's life, God gave and would keep giving His grace to Paul. Paul was desperate in his desire to find relief from this burden, but there are two ways of relief. It can come by removing the load or by strengthening the shoulder that bears the load. Instead of taking away the thorn, God strengthened Paul under it, and God would show His strength through Paul's apparent weakness.

To do this, Paul had to believe that God's grace is sufficient for him. We really don't believe God's grace is sufficient until we believe we are insufficient. How did God's grace make the difference? Whose grace, is it? It is the grace of Christ. Remember too that Jesus suffered thorns, so He cares and He knows. "My grace is sufficient for you." It is right now. Not that it will be some day, but right now, at this moment, His grace is sufficient.

You believed something had to change for God's grace to be enough. You thought, "His grace was sufficient before, His grace may be sufficient again, but not now, not with what I am going through." Despite that feeling, God's word stands. "My grace is sufficient for you." Charles Spurgeon wrote, "It is easy to believe in grace for the past and the future, but to rest in it for the immediate necessity is true faith. Believer, it is now that grace is sufficient: even at this moment it is enough for thee."

"My grace is sufficient for you." You know what? I'm so glad God didn't say, "My grace is sufficient for Paul the Apostle." I might have felt left out. But God made it broad enough. You can be the "you" in for you. God's grace is sufficient for you! Are you beyond it? Are you so different? Is your thorn worse than Paul's or worse than many others who have known the triumph of Jesus? Of course not. This sufficient grace is for you.

Dear beloved sisters and brothers in Christ, Paul's profound declaration, "My grace is sufficient for you," is a divine reassurance that transcends our weaknesses and challenges. This grace is not just a temporary relief but a continual source of strength and sustenance. It reminds us that no matter the thorns we face—whether they be physical ailments, emotional struggles, or spiritual battles—God's grace is more than enough to carry us through. This promise assures us that we are never alone or inadequate; God's grace is always sufficient, transforming our weaknesses into testimonies of His enduring love and strength. Fairfield Grace, may God's grace, peace, goodness, and mercy be with you, your family, your business, your studies, and with the lives of your children. To Christ be thanks and praise. Amen.