

## **Theme: Whenever I Am Weak...**

- 1. ...God's Grace is Sufficient**
- 2. ...We are Strong in Christ**

### **Text: 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 (EHV)**

**<sup>7</sup>Therefore, to keep me from becoming arrogant due to the extraordinary nature of these revelations, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me, so that I would not become arrogant. <sup>8</sup>Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that he would take it away from me. <sup>9</sup>And he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, because my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will be glad to boast all the more in my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may shelter me. <sup>10</sup>That is why I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties, for the sake of Christ. For whenever I am weak, then am I strong.**

What do you delight in? Your children? Your grandchildren? Your family? The beauty of nature? A fantastic 4<sup>th</sup> of July fireworks display after gorging yourself on some delicious grilled food? Spending time on your favorite hobby? Your sports team winning the championship? Air conditioning? ☺ These are things that we'd probably say we "delight" in.

Did anyone think of things like difficulties? Physical ailments and diseases? Weaknesses? Hardships? Persecutions? Have you ever prayed, "Thank you, Lord, for the difficulties in my life. I delight in them and I really would like You to send more my way! Amen." Probably not.

And yet how did the Apostle Paul end our text for today? "**I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties**" (v. 10). That can't be right. Did Paul really mean "**delight**"?! I noticed one translation translated this verse "**I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities**" (v. 10 ESV). So I double checked that word in the Greek, just to be sure, and it doesn't mean just to be "**content with.**" It means "*be well pleased with, take pleasure or delight in, be glad in*" (Friberg Greek Lexicon).

How could Paul possibly say this, and is he actually being serious here? Well, yes, he is serious. Paul could say these things and even "**delight**" in his difficulties because He trusted in Jesus, and in his own words, endured them "**for the sake of Christ**" (v. 10). Paul's words in our text are a good example for us to follow to help us, not just *endure* or "be content with" the difficulties and hardships that we encounter in our lives, but also to be *thankful* for them, and in the end, be "delighted" that God allowed us to go through them.

In our text we read about a particular difficulty that Paul had to endure. He calls it "**a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me**" (v. 7). That does not sound pleasant, does it? Doesn't sound like something we would "delight" in. But Paul could be thankful for the "**thorn**" in his flesh because he understood the reason why God had allowed it in his life and trusted that God was going to use that difficulty for his highest good.

You see, the apostle Paul was blessed with many spiritual gifts and talents. He was given the ability to speak in tongues, and apparently did so more often than any of the Corinthian Christians (**1 Corinthians 14:18**). He was quite possibly the most successful Christian missionary in history, and was inspired by God to write 13 books of the New Testament. In the first verses of this chapter Paul recounts how he was also apparently given many "**visions**" and "**revelations**" from God, one of which appears to have been a vision of heaven itself (**2 Corinthians 12:1-6**). Because of these spiritual gifts and revelations from God, Paul may have been tempted to "**become arrogant**" (v. 7) or conceited. God wanted to prevent this from happening, so He allowed Paul to suffer from this "**thorn in the flesh.**"

Now, we don't know exactly what this affliction was, but it most likely was a physical ailment of some kind. It could have been blindness or some sort of problem with his eyesight. (Remember he was blinded for a time when Christ appeared to Him on the road to Damascus.) Others believe it may have been a chronic illness, a physical disability, or perhaps a speech impediment. Regardless of what this **“thorn in the flesh”** was exactly, this difficulty, this “disability” kept Paul humble. It helped him realize and recognize his limitations as a man. More importantly this affliction was a constant reminder for him that he was a weak, human being, completely dependent on the grace of God.

Ever been there before? Ever had to deal with a **“thorn in your flesh”**? Ever faced difficulties in your life? Have you ever felt weak? Of course we have. We are all human beings like the Apostle Paul was. We have frailties and a fallen, sinful nature just like Paul did. **“Whenever we are weak...”** what do we do?

Paul shows us in our text the first step we are to take when we encounter difficulties, weaknesses, and **“thorns”** in our lives: Prayer! Paul writes, **“Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this [thorn in his flesh], that he would take it away from me.” (v. 8).** This ailment was obviously very troubling to Paul. Remember he even called it **“a messenger of Satan, to torment me” (v. 7).** No doubt Satan's use of Paul's affliction was to try and tempt him to despair, to lose trust in God, and to blame God for allowing this difficulty to come upon Him. But God had another purpose for this **“thorn”** in Paul's flesh. As He always does God turned evil (Satan's **“messenger”**) into Paul's good. When Paul heard God's answer to his prayer (v. 9) he realized that, even though it wasn't the answer he had been hoping for, it was for his own spiritual and eternal good.

What was God's answer to Paul's prayers? **“My grace is sufficient for you” (v. 9).** God's grace in Christ—His undeserved love and the salvation He won for Paul by His death on the cross was more than sufficient to give Paul what he needed in the midst of hard times. In His infinite love, God also indicated to Paul by these words that His gifts of grace, above and beyond the forgiveness and eternal life that he had already been assured of, would, in fact, preserve him and bear him up during whatever trials and difficulties might come his way. This grace, not his own power, is what Paul needed to rely on.

In the same way, **“Whenever we are weak,”** remember **1. God's grace is sufficient.** In His grace—His undeserved, unearned, and unconditional love—He sent His son Jesus to take away the biggest **“thorn in our flesh,”** our sins. These thorns were impossible for us to bear and guaranteed our condemnation. But Jesus bore our thorns for us, and He bore a crown of thorns of His own in order to crown us with the crown of life and make our **“thorns”** in this life easier to bear. The assurance of forgiveness that Christ's death has won for us gives us all we truly need to make it through this life—no matter how difficult it is. And yet our God is so generous and loving that He has also assured us **“My grace is sufficient for you” (v. 9),** indicating that He will also supply us with the gifts of grace that we need to overcome the difficulties and **“thorns”** in our lives, whatever they may be.

Let's not forget the rest of God's answer to Paul's pleading prayers: There was one more reason why the Lord allowed Paul's “thorn in the flesh” to continue. In God's response to Paul's pleading He said, **“My grace is sufficient for you, because my power is made perfect in weakness.” (v. 9).** By enduring the difficulties of his **“thorn in the flesh”** Paul kept the spotlight off himself and kept it directed on Christ and His power. He says at the end of v. 9, **“Therefore I will be glad to boast all the more in my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may shelter me.”** Paul knew that Christ was glorified through his weaknesses, His grace and His strength were made evident, and all the glory was given to Christ. Paul was more than willing to rely completely on Christ's strength, rather than his own feeble abilities. That is why he was able to state the profound paradox that concludes our text, **“For whenever I am weak, then am I strong” (v. 10).**

The same is true for us. We can confidently say with Paul, **“Whenever we are weak...” 2. We are strong in Christ!** In other words, **“when I am weak”** in myself, in my own strength and abilities, **“then I am strong”** in Christ, relying fully on His grace and His strength. We, like Paul can also **“boast all the more in [our] weaknesses” (v. 9)** because in them Christ’s strength is displayed, and not our own. Wouldn’t we much rather have His strength working in us and for us? Obviously, yes! So when Satan attacks us with his thorns and aims for our weaknesses we can be confident that God is using these difficulties, trials, and hard times for our good, and that in our weakness is where we find Christ’s strength—our true strength.

God has entrusted us with our own individual set of experiences and **“thorns in our side,”** just like he gave the Apostle Paul. Now, God told Paul the reason for allowing his **“thorn”** in his flesh. However, many times God doesn’t give us an immediate or clear explanation as to why He has allowed them. Can we still trust in Him even if He never tells us why? We can!

### **“Whenever we are weak...”**

- † We can turn to the Lord in prayer for help and pray, “Thy will be done,” and trust that His answer is always best.
- † **God’s Grace is Sufficient.** We can remember that all of our setbacks, difficulties, our hard times—and yes, even our *tragedies*—are all being worked out for our good and for God’s glory. We can remember that the God who loved us so much that He would send His Son to suffer death and even hell itself for us to give us heaven will never allow something to happen to us that isn’t for our ultimate good—our *spiritual* and *eternal* good!
- † **We are strong in Christ.** God has said to us the same thing He said to Paul, **“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (v. 9).** Therefore, even in the midst of difficulties, hardships, **“thorns,”** and weakness we can “delight” in them because of Christ (**“for the sake of Christ” v. 10**), and we can say with the Apostle Paul, **“For whenever I am weak, then am I strong” (v. 10).** Amen!