

The Sufficiency of God's Grace

2 Corinthians 12:7-10

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Take your Bible and open it to 2 Corinthians 12:7. Today I want us to look at the sufficiency of God's grace and how it applies to our life. The word *grace* is used some 155 times in the New Testament. It means a favor bestowed. It means a generous benefit freely given. It's a favor given by God through His power to transform a person's life.

Grace generously applies the goodness of God and the resources of God to our lives to save us, to keep us, to enable us, to deliver us, and to sanctify us. All of God's blessings to us are given to us through this means called grace.

Ephesians 2:4 says, "Because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, (5) made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved. (6) And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with Him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, (7) in order that in the coming ages He might show the incomparable riches of His grace, expressed in His kindness to us in Christ Jesus. (8) For it is by grace you have been saved...." You and I do not deserve to be saved and have a place in heaven, but by God's favor and blessing He saved us. Why? So that in the coming ages He might show how wonderful and incomparable His grace really is. God's grace is incomparable. There is nothing that measures up to God's grace.

One of the most wonderful statements about our Lord Jesus is found in **John 1:14** which says Jesus was "full of grace." Then in **verse 16** the Bible says, "From the fullness of His grace we have all received one blessing after another." We have received grace upon grace. As God's people we are accumulating God's grace. There is not a day that goes by that you are not a recipient of God's grace and blessings. It is grace that upholds your salvation. It is grace that gives you victory in temptation. It is grace that helps you understand the Word of God. It is grace that gives you the desire to pray. It is grace that

makes you useful for service. It is grace that enables your spiritual gift to function in the Spirit.

2 Corinthians 9:8 says, “And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.” That verse alone is sufficient enough to demonstrate the sufficiency of God’s grace. God is able to make all grace abound in your life. Grace to understand God’s Word. Grace to wisely apply it. Grace to endure suffering. Grace to deal with disappointment. Grace to endure pain. Grace to obey the Lord. Grace to love your spouse. Grace to raise and train your children. No wonder a few verses later in **2 Corinthians 9:14** it is called “the surpassing grace of God.”

In **Acts 4:33** this grace is called “much grace.” **Acts 14:3** it’s called “enabling grace.” **Romans 5:17** it’s called “abundant grace.” In **Romans 5:20** we are told “where sin increased, grace increased all the more.” In **Ephesians 1:6** it’s called God’s “glorious grace.” **Ephesians 1:7** we read about “the riches of God’s grace.” **James 4:6** tells us God “gives us more grace.” No wonder Peter described God in **1 Peter 5:10** as “the God of all grace.” God even concluded the Bible, the very last verse says, by saying “The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God’s people. Amen” (Rev. 22:21).

From all of that you get the distinct idea that God has not skimmed on grace. He has not held back. He spared no expense when it came to grace. Grace for salvation, grace for spiritual growth. Grace for service. Grace for suffering. No matter what area of life God has grace for it. His benevolent good favor gives to us the transforming power we need to be sustained in every dimension of spiritual life.

I have said all of that just to introduce **2 Corinthians 12:7-10** [read it].

From those verses I want us to see six principles, six truths about God’s all sufficient grace.

1. God's grace produces humility in our lives (7).

Number one, God's grace produces humility in your life. Look at **verse 7**, "To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me." To help us understand the sufficiency of God's grace and how it operates in our lives let's walk through verse 7 phrase by phrase.

Notice Paul begins this verse by saying, "To keep me from becoming conceited...." God's grace is going to work in your life to help you become humble and stay humble. God does not want you to exalt yourself and get the spiritual big head because of what He has done in your life or what He has taught you. God does not want you to become conceited, smug, arrogant and spiritually snobbish. It is more important that you are *humble* than *happy*. There is power in humility.

James 4:10 says, "Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will lift you up." We hear a similar truth in **1 Peter 5:6**, "Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that He may lift you up in due time." Even in the midst of heartache and pain there is lifting-up-power in humility. Humility is the door to encouragement and hope.

Proverbs 11:2 says, "When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom." **Proverbs 18:12** says, "Before his downfall a man's heart is proud, but humility comes before honor." Humility is the gate to wisdom, honor, and being lifted up by the Lord. There is power in humility.

In order for Paul to be used at the level God wanted him to be used Paul could not become conceited and prideful. He had to be humble. In the same way, in order for God to use you in the way He wants to use you in His kingdom He does not want you to become conceited and exalt yourself and for you to think that you are better than others because of what God has taught you or done for you.

But what was it that Paul could be conceited about and prideful about? He tells us. Look at **verse 7** again, "To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations...." What "revelations" is he talking about? For one, he is talking about

this visionary trip to heaven God took him own (1 Cor. 12:1-6). He could also be referring to the revelations given to him regarding the gospel of Jesus Christ (Gal. 1:11-12; Eph. 3:3) and the thirteen revelations that God inspired him to write which makes up half of the New Testament. God had shown and taught Paul a lot. Because of his knowledge, insight, and these revelations by God Paul was being tempted to become conceited and exalt himself rather than to exalt the Lord.

I believe something similar happens to many believers. God begins to teach them many wonderful things in His Word, they begin to lead people to Christ, and they become a significant source of encouragement to other believers. They begin to see themselves greater than they really are. They forget that it was God's grace that has given them the insights into God's Word. They have forgotten that it was God's grace that opened the door for them to minister. They have forgotten that it was God's grace that allows them to be a source of encouragement to other people. They begin to think of themselves as someone important and their knowledge, insight, and influence has to do with their own personal greatness. So to keep us from becoming spiritual arrogant and conceited God gives us something.

This brings us to our next phrase in this verse. Look at **verse 7** again, "To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me...." Now watch this. What Paul is about to describe was a gift from God. It was given to him by the Lord in order to keep him humble. Satan has no plans for keeping God's people humble. He knows the power of humility. He wants you to be conceited, arrogant, and prideful. Satan wants you to be like him and Satan's downfall began with pride.

Now here is what you need to do? This is going to be difficult, but you must see it this way. What God does next in verse 7 is a gift to Paul. It's not a punishment. It's not discipline. It's a gift.

So what was given to Paul that would keep him from becoming conceited and keep him humble? He says in **verse 7**, "there was given me a thorn in my flesh...." When you hear the word "thorn" you probably think of the type of thorn you would find on a rose bush. That is not the kind of thorn this is referring too. The word "thorn" (skolops) refers to more of a stake. A shaft of wood sharpened at one end to be used in battle to impale

someone. It's the kind of stake you drive in the ground to keep a tent from blowing away or the kind of stake you drive in the ground and attach a rope to in order to keep an animal from wondering off.

So Paul is saying there was given to him by God a stake to kill his flesh and to keep it under control so that he would not give in to his proud flesh. Some people have given all kinds of answers for what this thorn in the flesh could have been. You will find commentators saying that it could have been migraines, malaria, epilepsy, gallstones, rheumatism, intestinal disorder, speech problem, or even blindness. However, I don't think it's any of those physical issues. I think this thorn in the flesh dealt with a moral or spiritual issue. This thorn was to keep him from being prideful about his spiritual knowledge and his experiences with God.

So what does he say it is? In **verse 7** he describes this "thorn in the flesh" as "a messenger of Satan." What is "a messenger of Satan"? The word "messenger" (angelos) refers primarily to angels. An angel of Satan is what the Bible calls a *demon*. In some way God has allowed a messenger of Satan to become a thorn in Paul's flesh to keep him humble. How does this look? Based on the context of this chapter Paul was being attacked severely by false teachers and false apostles that were driven by satanic forces. God allowed this person to attack Paul, discredit Paul, and say all kinds of damaging things about Paul in order to keep Paul humble.

What did this messenger of Satan do to Paul? Look at the end of **verse 7** again, "there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me." Some translations say "buffet" or "harass." The word "torment" means to harshly treat someone. In Matthew 26:67 it is used to describe the soldiers striking Jesus in the face with their fist. In 1 Corinthians 4:11 it used to describe someone being brutally abused. Paul is saying that what this messenger of Satan is doing is causing him to feel like he was being abused and punched in the face. This was tormenting Paul. What this messenger of Satan was doing was crushing Paul on the inside.

Why did God allow and give to Paul this thorn in the flesh, this messenger of Satan to torment him? To keep him from becoming conceited. To protect him from pride. You may

be asking, “Does God use Satan like that? Does God use evil people and evil circumstances like that to keep us from being conceited and prideful?” Yes.

This is not the first time in the Bible God used Satan in some way to help bring about positive change and growth in God’s people.

- God used Satan to teach Job how to hold on to God during difficult times (Job 1:7-20) Every time a disaster happened in Job’s life, which was allowed by God but caused by Satan, he turned to God and worshipped more intently. With each Satanic blow Job grew closer to God and he would not let go. Today we would say that each storm drew Him closer to the Savior. So God can use Satan to teach us to hold on to God more tightly.
- God used Satan to help Peter become stronger in order to strengthen others. In Luke 22:31 Jesus tells Peter that Satan has asked to sift Peter like wheat. The reason Satan wanted to sift Peter was to separate the good and the bad in Peter in order to point out the bad. But instead of stopping Satan from sifting Peter, Jesus told Peter that He would pray that when the sifting is over that Peter would turn back and strengthen the other believers. God was going to use this sifting by Satan to make Peter stronger.
- Now here in 2 Corinthians 12 we see God using Satan again, but this time God is going to allow a messenger of Satan to torment Paul and become a massive thorn in his flesh in order to keep Paul from becoming prideful and conceited.

What does this say to us? There are some things in your life that is considered spiritual warfare that God has allowed into your life in order to strengthen you, draw you closer to Him, or to protect you from a sin (like pride). That mean person in your life, that bully, that rude person, that trouble maker, that thorn in the flesh that makes your life miserable, that messenger of Satan may be allowed to be in your life as a gift to help you become who God wants you to be.

2. God's grace draws us closer to the Heavenly Fatherly (8).

This brings us to our second observation about God's grace. **Number two, God's grace draws us closer to the Heavenly Fatherly.** Notice Paul stated in **verse 8**, "Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me." Paul wanted this thorn in the flesh and this messenger of Satan that was tormenting him to be taken away from him. Paul wanted this messenger of Satan relocated. Can't you hear Paul praying, "God, I don't care how you do it or what it takes, remove this messenger of Satan from my life."

Have you ever prayed anything like that? "Lord, I don't know if I can work one more day with that person? They lie about me and to me. They have insulted me, slandered me, and have become a hindrance and a burden regarding what you want me to do for you. Lord, you are going to have to remove this person?" Have you ever thought or prayed anything like that? Paul has. Maybe you've prayed secretly a similar prayer about your spouse, about your parents, or about your kids. Maybe about your neighbors, your pastor, or a fellow believer in the church that seems to create one problem after another.

Well, Paul prayed this prayer three times. He kept going to God and talking to God about it. He says, "three times I pleaded with the Lord." This was not some lay-me-down-to-sleep prayer. He was *pleading* with God, begging for this messenger of Satan to be removed. As painful and bothersome as this messenger of Satan was to Paul it did do one thing. It kept driving Paul back to God in prayer. One of the results of this messenger of Satan was Paul praying.

In the same way, whatever thorn there is in your life or a messenger of Satan harassing you let it draw you closer to God. Let it cause you to have many conversations with the Lord.

3. God's grace is sufficient for every problem (9).

Paul has prayed three times about this thorn driving him to the ground in his life. We now come to a third observation about God's grace with God's answer to Paul's prayer.

Number three, God's grace is sufficient for every problem. Notice what the Lord said to Paul in **verse 9**, "My grace is sufficient for you." Paul asked God three times to remove

this thorn, but three times God said “My grace is sufficient for you.” This is practical grace. God is saying, “I’m not going to remove this problem because this problem is keeping you humble and that’s the position I can work in you and through you the most. Instead of removing the problem I’m going to bless you (that’s grace) by giving you whatever it is you need to successfully face this thorn and this messenger of Satan every day. I’m going to give you the strength, the wisdom, the patience, and the encouragers in your life to get you through this valley and to face this messenger of Satan.” God is telling Paul and us that sometimes you don’t need the problem removed, you need God’s grace operating in your life so that you will discover that God and His blessings are sufficient to face whatever it is God wants you to face. God’s grace is sufficient for you.

4. God’s grace produces power out of pain (9).

Number four, God’s grace produces power out of pain. Notice in **verse 9** the Lord went on to say, “For my power is made perfect in weakness.” God’s power is shown to be most effective through our weaknesses. Power in ministry and in God’s kingdom is connected to our weaknesses. It is when you lose all your own trust in your human abilities and place your trust in God to work through you that you become powerful in His hands. As long as you think you are it, you are the driving force, you are the one pulling it all off and it’s because of your skills, your abilities, your smarts, your social skills, your spirituality, or your godliness that God is at work then you are missing perfect power of God through you. God’s power works through your weaknesses not in spite of them.

There is no such thing as *painless power*. Whatever kind of power you name, you’ll find it to be something which is developed at an expense. It requires pressure, fire, constriction, or tribulation of some kind. For example, **water power** comes from the pressure of accumulated masses of water backed up by a dam and forced through turbines which generate electricity. **Steam power** comes by fire which heats the water until it expands and creates pressure in a cylinder. **Electric power** is by constriction which acts by a negative and positive current causing motion. **Gasoline power** is the explosion of volatile gasoline in a chamber called a cylinder where that exploded gasoline expands and pushes the cylinder head to create motion. And it’s a similar kind of thing where in the spiritual realm physical suffering, mental anguish, and emotional trauma create a pressure that

produces power through Christ in the Christian life. The worst of times God can use to bring out the best of Christ in you. For His power is made perfect in your weakness.

5. God's grace allows you to boast about your weakness (9).

Number five, God's grace allows you to boast about your weakness. Look at the end of **verse 9**, "Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me." This word "weakness" means handicap. We've all got these weaknesses and handicaps in our lives. He is not talking about sins. None of us are perfect. Paul is saying, "Whatever God does through me it will happen through my weaknesses. When the power of Christ is resting on me, when He is using me He is using me with my weaknesses." You may criticize Paul the man, you may criticize what he does and how he does it but you have difficulty if in his weakness he is powerful for God.

For example, I am an introvert (I like to be alone and I like to work by myself), I have a short term memory, when I preach I use a lot of notes and even manuscript my sermon (some see that as a weakness), I've struggled with my weight all my life, I get discouraged easier than I would like, I don't pray as much as I should, but this one thing I know Christ power still flows through me and has used me many times with all my weaknesses in full bloom. When God uses me with my weaknesses all I can say is that whatever God has done through me it was by His grace. Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses because it gives Him more glory.

What are your weaknesses? What are your handicaps? Do you still find yourself being used of God? Do you find that God gets more glory when He does something through you even when you did a lousy job? God does not work around your weaknesses, He works through them. He does not work through you in spite of your weaknesses, He works with them. That's why God can take an uneducated man and lead many people to Christ. That's how God uses a man who slaughters the English language and makes up words like Dwight L. Moody to preach the gospel to thousands. You may be an introvert or an extravert, you may be a genius or you may be a C- student, you may like to work behind the scenes rather than out front, you may be afraid to speak up in a crowd, or you may talk too much, but if any of those are weaknesses in your situation that God has called

you I want you to know that God loves to work through what you and others consider weak because it is there that God gets the glory.

6. God's grace creates contentment in difficult circumstances (10).

Number six, God's grace creates contentment in difficult circumstances. The Bible says in **verse 10**, "That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong." There is a life principle to live by. Paul has learned to "delight" in his difficulties knowing that is when Christ can operate at the greatest level through his life. This word "delight" (eudokeo) can also be translated "content" or "pleased." Think about what Paul is saying and what God is teaching us here. If God can use my weaknesses, the insults that are directed toward me, hardships of various kinds, persecutions because of my faith, and difficulties of assorted types for the sake of Christ and God's kingdom then I will delight and be contented in those difficult circumstances. Because of God's grace I am able to see my weaknesses and difficulties as an instrument for Jesus to use in my life to receive more glory as He works in me and through me.

Having a proper perspective on trouble, trials, and suffering is the cornerstone of Christian living. Focusing all one's efforts on removing difficulties is not the answer. Believers need to embrace the trials God allows them to undergo, knowing that those trials reveal their character, humble them, draw them closer to God, and allow Him to display His grace and power in their lives. Each one of us need to remember **James 1:2** which says, "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, (3) because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. (4) Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything."

Conclusion

God has not held back His grace. Even when it looks like God is absent God's grace is still operating in your life. He spared no expense when it came to grace. Grace for salvation, grace for spiritual growth, grace for service, and grace for suffering. Even when God does

not do or remove what you want Him to do or remove He does what He does out of loving grace.

Ephesians 2:4 says, “Because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, (5) made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved.” God wants to save you. He wants to bless you with eternal life. He wants to give you a new reason to live. God is presenting you an opportunity of an eternal lifetime through His Son Jesus Christ. Would you give your life to Jesus today? [lead in salvation]