

It's Not About Me, But ...

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[0 : 00] We're going to be looking at 2 Corinthians chapter 12 today, a familiar passage, chapter 12, verses 7 through 10.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer. Father, thank you. It is a privilege to gather with your people to worship you, the living God.

It is a necessity to grow in grace as your people. We need this.

So Lord, minister your grace to us through word and sacrament today. We are needy. We come to you for grace, all sufficient grace.

We are hurting, so many of us. May your word find us. May Christ help us. May your spirit fill us.

[1 : 09] And fill your unworthy servant that he may preach this great grace. That Jesus might be seen to be the one who sustains us if we but trust him.

So Lord, come. Help us now in Christ's name. Amen. 2 Corinthians chapter 12, beginning at verse 7.

So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited.

Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave 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 of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities.

[2 : 29] For when I am weak, then I am strong. The word of the Lord. Please be seated. Thank you, praise team, once again.

It feels warm up here to me. Maybe it's me. It's age. It's your fault, gosh. Last week on Resurrection Sunday, we looked at the reality of life not being about you.

But let's be honest. That's a common expression. When you run into somebody we believe is being very self-centered, everybody says it.

It ain't about you, dog. It's not about you. We all say it. And I know you got it last week.

I know you understand. I know you got it. Jesus and his kingdom are bigger than us. He is our life. When we lose our life in him, that's when we find it.

[3 : 50] Now listen, it is easy to say when you're not suffering. It's easy to say it's not about me when you're not suffering.

But when I'm going through the wringer, when my lemons don't, I mean, come on. You're in pain. Somebody help. We feel very weak.

And that's when we tell everyone, including God, what we need. Suffering and silence. Very British, but not very biblical.

We need to let people know. We need to let God know as if he does it. But prayer is good. We'll talk about it. So God's people should never be indifferent to one another's pain and weakness.

Love won't let us. Not real love. Not God's love. Not agape that we all love to say. Won't let us be indifferent. But even more, how does Jesus respond to my pain and weakness when it's not about me?

[5 : 01] I'll give you the punchline. He gives all sufficient grace. All sufficient grace.

The title of this message is, it's not about me, but the Apostle Paul.

And this is this most personal letter. People, theologians call 2 Corinthians the most personal letter Paul ever wrote. It's become a deep friend of mine.

I've preached it in different parts of the world, actually, to our missionaries. It's a deep book. In it, Paul is defending his ministry among the Corinthians. That's striking, isn't it? You see, they were comparing him to these so-called super apostles. That's what he calls them in chapter 12. They had come to them and they began saying that Paul's ministry wasn't all that.

[6 : 05] They actually led the church to almost turn against their founding pastor. A group in the church began to lead people to attack Paul's character, his preaching, and his methods.

While at the same time pumping up themselves. I imagine them a little bit like faith prosperity preachers in there looking down on Paul because he's always in trouble.

He's not living the high life. He's not living the prosperous life. Unlike us. So Paul turns the tables in our chapter, chapter 12.

He turns the tables. Because false teachers tend to promote themselves and their spiritual greatness. So Paul does this. He plays along in the beginning of chapter 12, verse 1.

He begins to talk about this amazing experience that he had when he was caught up to the third heaven. Into the very presence of God, he says. And he heard things that he couldn't even tell us.

[7 : 13] And he didn't. But then he turns the tables again. And starts talking about his suffering.

And how this is really the mark of a true servant of Jesus. He highlights this experience. But not in the way they would have expected.

Today we talk much about trauma.

I don't have time to go through it all. But go back to chapter 11. Or chapter 4. Or chapter 6. Paul lists the trauma he had been through.

You ain't seen trauma. Until you compare to this. Not saying you haven't had traumatic experience. Not saying people haven't had trauma. I'm not denying that.

[8 : 15] So please don't go out of here saying that. All I'm saying is that when you look at what Paul went through. He was a walking disaster.

His body was a walking disaster. That's why Luke traveled with him. Luke was a doctor. I'm convinced. Paul had his own personal physician keeping him going. The trauma physical. Emotional. And now the people he served and pastored had turned against him. Wow. So there are three points I want you to notice here.

About dealing with pain. And suffering. And trauma. I pray God will speak to you from the text. First of all Christ's all sufficient grace. Because that's what it's about.

Grace. Uses what he calls thorns. To expose how weak we are. So to keep me from becoming conceited.

[9 : 16] Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations. Verse 7. A thorn was given me in the flesh. A messenger of Satan. To harass me. To keep me from becoming conceited.

Here's the great reason for the thorn that Paul experienced. We don't really know what it was. Of course. Suffice to say it wasn't pleasant.

So we can't minimize it. Christ didn't allow it because he wanted to destroy Paul. The enemy of our souls. The messenger of Satan.

Meant it for evil. But God meant it for good. Good. That's what he's doing in your life. He meant it for good. And what was the good?

Says it twice. In one verse. Says it twice. To keep me from becoming conceited. Meaning. He wanted to keep Paul. From having an undue sense. Of his own importance.

[10 : 11] And greatness. He didn't want Paul running around saying. Come to my meetings. Because there will be miracles. And signs and wonders. For some of us.

Maybe most of us. Success. Can become a drug. How many Christian leaders have been destroyed. By improper handling.

Of God's blessings. How many Christians. Pursue success. Getting ahead. And making a name. And wreck. Their relationships. And souls.

How do we even define success? I'll let you think about that. Christ intervenes. To keep us. From reading.

Our own newsletters. Don't you. Around the holidays. Especially Christmas. Did any of you. Get. Those newsletters. Family newsletters.

[11 : 08] From friends and family. Anybody get newsletters? You know. They're really pretty neat. And. But let's be honest. Many times. They talk only about. How great the kids are.

And how much the kids are prospering. When we read them. We think. This is the perfect family. And we wish ours. Was more like theirs. But they didn't put in the pain. And the weakness. Kids. And successful careers. Were doing great in school. But not walking with Jesus. Marriages.

And trouble. Fears. And doubts. They don't put those. In the newsletters. Because we don't boast. About our weaknesses. We boast. About greatness. Greatness. Paul. Paul.

[12:18] You wouldn't like his newsletter. His newsletter didn't look like that. Okay. I got to get just a few thoughts. On this newsletter.

Okay. Just turn. Just chapter 11. Just. Just turn back. If you would. He says. You gladly. Verse 19. You gladly bear with fools. Being wise yourselves. For. For you bear it. If someone makes slaves of you. Okay. To my shame. I must say. We are too weak for that. But. Okay. Let me.

Let me just jump in here. I. I dare. So dare to boast of that. Okay. Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they servants of Christ? Verse 23. I'm a better one. With far greater labors.

Far more imprisonments. Countless beatings. Often near death. Five times I received at the hands of the Jews. The 40 lashes less one. Five times. Three times I was beaten with rods.

[13:13] Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. A night and a day I was adrift at sea. On frequent journeys. In danger from rivers. Danger from robbers. Danger from my own people. Danger from the Gentiles.

Danger in the city. Danger in the wilderness. Danger at sea. Danger from false brothers. Listen y'all. Do you put that in the newsletter? Trauma.

That's true trauma, isn't it? Emotionally. Physically. Spiritually. It all came down on Paul for years. His entire ministry was one big trauma. And now we have a thorn in the flesh.

On top of the trauma. I think it was physical. Probably an eye issue. I have reasons for that. But don't worry about it. Don't matter. I believe it was physical.

[14:28] I don't think Paul liked feeling weak. He was a dynamo. Because when you. We don't like feeling weak. Because.

Well. It makes us look. Weak. In our weakness. Of us. And even of ourselves. Compare us to those we think are strong.

Which makes us feel even weaker. And inferior. I'm going to put that stuff in the newsletter. I'm reminded of a Peanuts cartoon.

Of course. Right. Lucy is always Lucy. Talking to Charlie Brown. He's looking all glum and beat down. And so she comes up to him and.

Says hey. What's worrying you Chuck? He says I feel inferior. Oh. Says Lucy.

[15:26] You shouldn't worry about that. Lots of people have that feeling. He says oh. They're inferior too.

No. Lucy replies. Replies. That you're inferior. Nothing like. Good friends.

Good Christian friends. To encourage you. Yeah. We feel inferior. The thorn in the flesh.

Hammered Paul. But suffering is God's way to show us we're weak. Not inferior. Unless we're comparing ourselves to Jesus. The devil will use people to compare you to others.

And also trick you into doing the same. That's not the point. Not to compare ourselves with others. Others. Second Corinthians 10.

[16:29] 12. Warns us against that. Not that we dare to classify. Or compare ourselves with some of those. Who are commending themselves. But when they measure themselves by one another.

And compare themselves with one another. They are without understanding. When people compare you to others. Don't listen. They are without understanding.

When you compare yourself to others. Stop doing it. Don't listen. You don't get it either. Yes. We're weak. Accept it on faith.

If you don't believe it. Trust it. You're weak. And your pain will reveal it.

Your suffering will show. The second thing I want you to notice. Is that Christ's all sufficient grace. Uses thorns to bring us to Christ. Oh hallelujah.

[17:31] Again. Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this. That it should leave me. Three times.

This is spiritual warfare. Make no mistake. A messenger of Satan came for Paul. And such come after you. And the message he wants you to receive is this.

You can't make it. You are no good. You are too weak. Your sins are too bad. God doesn't care that you're having trouble.

That you're having illness. That you're grieved. He doesn't care about that. That's what the devil is saying to people all the time. This thorn where Paul had hurt him deeply.

Yes. It hurt him deeply. I'm reminded of what he said in 2 Corinthians chapter 1 verse 9. About another situation. He said this. Indeed we felt that we have received the sentence of death.

[18 : 37] But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. Woo hoo. He said at one point in his ministry.

He's telling the Corinthians that he thought it was over. He thought they were going to take his life. He thought this was it. I'm going to Jesus and I'm coming banged up. Yeah. But he says but God was doing something in it.

And what was he doing? He was teaching me to rely not on myself and my resources and my ability to get out of this.

Or even my abilities in my own strength to stand up against this. Or my abilities to reason my way out and plan and finagle my way out of this.

Or even the doctor's ability to help me get through. I learned not to depend on myself or my resources but on God who raises the dead.

[19 : 40] Hallelujah. Hallelujah. When you're going through something that feels like death, you need to know there's someone who raises the dead. Because that's what gives us strength to keep going.

I got a big brother. I remember when I was kids, there were kids in my neighborhood. They had all boys and one cute little girl. But they had these boys and these boys were strapping.

I mean, they like cars. Mopar. They were, I mean, these guys were brutes, man. And I was a friend with one of the younger brothers. And I was so glad.

But, you know, you knew. You knew. If you messed with one of the little brothers, the others were coming. And you had to know if you weren't ready for that, don't do it.

I'm so glad we got an elder brother. He big too. He real big. That he's so big that even death can't take him.

[20 : 50] Paul said, yeah, this thorn was meant to bring me to God. To rely on God. Now, listen, I don't think that was the thorn he's talking about here.

This is another thing that was more long-term and more personal. That was a situation in chapter one I just took. That's a situation. This is something that's more ongoing, more attached to him. It hurts so much. Listen, here's how I brought him to God. He prayed to the Lord Jesus three times to remove it. Prayer is God bringing you to him.

Don't you see it? All-sufficient grace equips us for persistent prayer when we are suffering. Because grace reminds us that we are welcomed before the throne of God as children of the kingdom.

Jesus died and rose again to give you access to the throne room. So, yes, whatever you're going through is meant to bring you to Jesus, not push you away.

[22 : 05] The enemy wants to push you away. The enemy will tell you God doesn't care. If you believe it, you move away. But if you listen to Jesus, you move towards him.

Because his arms are open. Jesus understands our pain. Remember Hebrews 4, 15 and 16, describing Jesus, for we do not have a high priest who is unable, not that word, unable, who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses.

We don't have a high priest like that. He is able. But one who is in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

grace, unearned, undeserved kindness of God. Grace, great grace that makes the welcome for us purchased by the blood of Jesus.

You are welcome at this throne. And that's what this thing, this situation, this trauma, this pain is meant to do, is to bring you to Jesus, to cry out to him.

[23 : 33] Second, all sufficient grace does not mean we get whatever we ask from Jesus. He might say no to your particular request.

It doesn't mean, it does mean, though, that we get what we need to help us. We may receive mercy and found grace to help us.

He's not a vending machine that we just put in our quarters and we get whatever we pick. That's not the Jesus of the Bible. Sometimes we think we know what we need.

Oh, sorry. We always think we know what we need. Paul thought he knew what he needed too. He needed the thorn to be taken away.

It hurt. It hindered him, I'm sure. You know, he's doing ministry. And this thing is keeping him back. Paul's prayer is what I call a DTRP.

[24 : 42] DTRP. Define the relationship prayer. He was telling the Lord, hold it now.

We got to define this relationship. Because I should be able to do ministry a little easier than this.

You called me and told me to go and preach the gospel, Lord.

And I'm trying to do this. But this particular thought. Now, I know I've been to shipwrecks, the stonings. Yeah, you brought me through all that. But this thing that seems to be, I believe, attached to him physically, is something he can't get away from.

You see, eventually, you can get away from people, usually. Sometimes you can't, but usually you can. But when it's attached to you, you can't get away. I could do so much more ministry for you, Lord, if I just didn't have this particular weakness.

I could really be somebody. I could really do great things for the kingdom. I could make some money for the kingdom. Paul didn't say that, but you know.

[25 : 56] We always think we know what we need. But the Lord Jesus saw what Paul really needed. What he needed was to know more of Christ's grace for him.

He only saw with finite eyes how he could do more for Jesus without the thorn. But the thorn was Christ's means of doing more in Paul.

Did you catch it? We think we can do more without our pain, but the pain is God's method of doing more in us rather than through us.

He's less concerned about your ministry. And by ministry, the word ministry means service, by the way. It means service. So he's less concerned about your service to your family, to your work, to your church.

He is concerned, but he's less concerned about that than he is about what's happening inside of you, Kyle. Amen. He wants to do a work in you. Amen. And your suffering.

[27 : 03] And that thorn, controlled by him. Because remember, like we saw with Job, he holds the chains here. He holds the reins.

The devil wants to kill you and destroy you, and Jesus is going to hold it. Hold it. I'm doing something here. Sit down and shut up.

I'm doing something here with my son or my daughter. Grace is all-sufficient because it brings us to an all-sufficient Savior. Jesus is the all-sufficient grace of God in person.

You want grace, go to Jesus. You want acceptance. You want the kindness of God. You want to experience God's welcome and joy and blessing in your life.

It's only through Jesus. It's not something you can earn because you can't earn it. The wages of sin is death. That's all you can earn. Ah. Ah. But what God gives us is what we didn't earn and what we can't buy and can't barter for.

[28 : 14] He gives us his love and hope. He gives us his son. Because that is the great gift of the gospel.

It's Jesus. It's God. Grace. Jesus is the all-sufficient grace of God.

And our sufferings in faith take us out of merely believing biblical principles.

That's important. But it takes us out of merely believing the biblical principles to believing a biblical person.

Principles should lead to the person. The doctrine we learn should lead to the person. And that's what God is doing through your suffering.

[29 : 13] Bringing you to a person. This last thing. Christ's all-sufficient grace reveals Christ's power in us. That's the good part, right?

You couldn't wait to get there. I got there. Three times I asked and the Lord said, My grace is sufficient for you. Sufficient for you.

For my power is made perfect in weakness. Now, Paul's response is, Well, if that's true, Lord. He reminds me of Peter. Wash my whole body.

If that's true, then I will boast. Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest on me. For this, Now, this is a powerful phrase.

For the sake of Christ. For the glory of Christ. For Christ's sake. I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities.

[30 : 07] For when I am weak, then I am strong. There it is. Boom, baby. Ah! Drop the mic. Christ's power is made perfect, not in weakness in general, but in your weakness.

It was true of Jesus himself. It's on the cross. The excruciating moment of Christ's greatest weakness, but now at the cross, we see his mighty strength.

First Corinthians 1, For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God. The power of God was being revealed on the cross when Jesus was slain, naked, and ashamed, and embarrassed, and humbled, and in weakness, and bleeding, and gasping, but yet that was the great display of the power of God.

We magnify, we exalt, and we reveal Christ's great strength in our weakness. Weakness.

What does it mean by weakness? Well, as Packer says in his book, *Weakness is the Way*, it means inadequacy. Do you recognize that you're inadequate?

[31 : 34] I didn't say inferior. I said inadequate. Inadequate. Do you feel that? Weakness can be physical, intellectual, personal, relational.

I can't go through all the definitions there, but I'll let you think about it. In all those areas of our lives, we find areas of weakness. And that's where Jesus wants to reveal his power.

Right there. He wants you to recognize, like he says in chapter four of this great letter, that you are just merely a jar of clay. So that the surpassing greatness of God's power might be revealed.

There's a treasure in you. The treasure is the gospel. Go back and read 2 Corinthians 4, 7, 3, 11, just for yourself, your own personal edification. Oh, there it is.

We have this treasure in jars of clay to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. So we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed, perplexed, but not driven to despair, persecuted, but not forsaken, struck down, but not destroyed.

[32 : 44] You can stop there. All those things are real. And Paul's describing his life. Does yours fit in here somewhere?

I know mine does. Do you know something about this? It's just a clay pot. Frail humanity.

But within that frail humanity is the power and the majesty of the treasure of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Christ in you, the hope of glory.

That's in you. So why haven't you fallen apart? When people look and watch you and they see your grief, they see your pain, they see, see, if you are drawing strength from the reality that you know, grace, grace, is what's sustaining you.

If you're going to Jesus, they're seeing, and they're going, man, what's happening? And woe unto you if you tell them, I'm just being, I'm just toughing it out. What do you mean just toughing it out?

[33 : 58] Okay. You've forgotten. No one, Christian, you don't just tough it out. You go to Jesus for grace.

And he causes his glory to be seen in your weakness. That's why you're still here. That's why you're still standing. Well, I pray that you all would know what this weakness to strength because of all sufficient grace, I pray you would know it.

Allow your weakness to reveal Christ's great power in you. Allow his all sufficient grace to be your strength. Don't be ashamed that you are weak and inadequate.

Put that on your prayer, on your newsletter. Shock folk. I'm weak. Pray for me. My family doesn't have it all together.

Pray for us. Now we bless now. God's been blessing us. Hey, praise the Lord. You can talk, yeah, we want to give him glory, give him praise. I'm not saying don't do that. Stop falling for the world's view of success.

[35 : 25] Stop falling for the false prophet's view of success. We're great. It's all good. We're the head and not the tail.

Foolishness. Paul would never have said that. Grace admits, grace admits, I don't have it all together.

Grace, all sufficient grace, admits, I have a Savior who does. Where's your strength coming from? Johnny Esther and Todd has a great book. I hope you'll get it. I don't get any royalties from this. It's just beautiful. *Songs of Suffering*.

Is that my timer? I'm watching the clock. I'm almost there. And she's, it's about hymns, and she's quoting, she's reminding us about when peace, when peace like a river, it is well with my soul.

[36 : 37] She's commenting on this hymn. You know how it goes. When peace like a river, attendeth my way, like when sorrows, like sea billows roll, whatever my lot, that has taught me to say, it is well, it is well with my soul.

Though Satan should buff me, though trials should come, let this blessed assurance control that Christ have regarded my helpless estate and have shed his own blood for my soul.

Ha! Peace! When you know that. She writes, because she lived with pain. She lives with pain. When the fangs of pain sink into my hips and lower back, it's a signal to begin deep breathing. Deep breathing. I then walk into the pain and hold it near me, even have a conversation with it. I don't fret and say, this is killing me! Or I can't stand this. Oh, oh no, not again. Words like that are fraught with anxiety, and we know that fear only exacerbates the problem.

[37 : 43] Instead, I serenely acknowledge the pain, allow it to press me in on all sides, and then I take one more step of faith. I ask my Savior to not let it crush me, but to meet me in it.

He always does. He always does. She's a quadriplegic over 50 years of pain and suffering. Ask Jesus to meet you in the midst of your trauma, of your pain.

He'll do it. Father, help us in the midst of our pain and suffering. Lord, it's easy for us to run away from you.

And Lord, we don't want to do that, but sometimes we do. And Lord, will you draw us back? Draw us to Jesus. Draw us to the one who says his grace is sufficient because his strength is made perfect in our weakness.

Oh, Lord, we would see your power. We will rejoice. Teach us even, Lord, in some sense to boast in our sufferings, not in a self-centered way like we saw last week, Lord, but in a way that says we recognize that you're at work in them.

[39 : 02] And so we're giving you glory. In the midst of them. Show us how. Teach us how. In Jesus' name. Amen.