

Intro: See if you can finish these two sentences from your childhood, OK? Should be familiar to you...In Trouble

- This is going to hurt ME more than it is going to.....? (Hurt you)
- I'm doing this for your own good! One day you are going to? (Thank Me!)

Many of us HEARD those things when we were in trouble and being disciplined...but most of us never believed them! I used to think in response to the first one.... "Hey, just a thought...spare yourself the pain! I'm OK with that!"

That is the reality of what the Apostle Paul is saying to us about what has taken place in his life as a follower of Jesus. Paul is telling us, God has given me some "gifts"...and I'm not so sure I want to thank Him for them! He has had some incredible experiences, so good and some bad...but at the end of the day he knows...God is At Work!

2 Cor 12:1-10 Pg 822

Finding God's Strength In Our Weakness

1. God's Gifts Are Not Always What We Expect!

Paul recounts for us 3 different kinds of gifts he received from God. They are NOT ALL what we typically think of as gift!

- **Gifts of Glory:** *Mountaintop experiences:* 12:1-6
>We love these! Peter, James and John at Mt of Transfiguration
>We sometimes have those spiritual experiences that we can't even put words to
- **Gifts of Struggle:** *Valley experiences:* 11:22-29
>Paul had some incredible difficult experiences as he followed Jesus path in his life. Wasn't easy
>Most of us never have anything approaching this kind of struggle: **Illus:** They said mean things about me
- **Gift of the thorn:** *Persistent:* 12:7
>These are the most difficult. Because we don't understand **WHY** God doesn't intervene.
>We do what Paul did...we pray...over and over...for some of us MUCH MORE than 3 times! (Specific events)
But we do not receive an answer...or worse...we get an answer we don't want!
>Paul got an answer..."No, I will not remove this from your life, you will live with it, I will use it for your good!"
 1. It was a gift from God! Vs 7 "given me"
 2. It was for Paul's benefit Vs 7 "Keep me" (*The sin of pride was greater danger than the pain of the problem!*)
Purpose Clause: Reason for it...Hold me back! 1. *Help others, Make me more like Jesus...*
 3. It was some kind of physical infirmity...No one really knows. Great speculation "thorn in my flesh"
 4. It was a constant source of pain for Paul: "Torment" Lit = *to hit with the fist, or, to slap in the face*

Paul got 3 gifts from God...1 was amazingly positive...the other 2 were incredibly painful and difficult.

Here is the key though. ALL 3 were GIFTS from God!

God allowed those things in Paul's life because He was at work in Paul, making him into the follower of Jesus: Great Works!

Illus: About a year ago...Transformational moment...Working with my Spiritual director "Where is God's Grace?" here?

2. Our Response To God's Gifts Determines Whether Or Not We Benefit From His Work In Us. 12:9

We don't have any control over what happens to us...God does what He sees as best.

But, we DO have control over the way we RESPOND to God's work in our life.

5 Potential Responses To Struggle

- Become Bitter and blame God for robbing us of our preferred future! "God you didn't give me what I wanted!"
- Give up: Stop trying and just exist. "Fatalistic attitude, God's going to what He wants...doesn't matter."
- Buckle down and try harder: *Run ourselves into the ground. Give all of our strength...Collapse*
- Ask...and Never Accept No: *STUCK Stay on treadmill, never listening, never believe God might be saying NO*
- Ask and Accept No Answer: *Rise above the day to day, Embrace the GIFT of God...Learn Lesson God wants*

Let's stop here for a second...and look: Can you see yourself?

How do YOU respond when things don't go the way you want...or expect...or hope?

Do you find yourself in one of those wrong places?

If so, I want to encourage you to pay close attention to the next few minutes...

Paul Teaches us HOW to Find God's Strength In Our Weakness!

3. Finding God's Strength In Our Weakness.

12:9

This is the culmination of the entire book. Paul has been driving toward this point for 12 chapters...Here we have the pinnacle

- **Hear Him:**
He said: Perfect tense! An answer that continues to ring in Paul's ears! → **Illus:** I know nothing...talk non stop!
- **Trust Him:**
My Grace is sufficient! Lit = to be enough, to be content, to satisfy (related to ward off, build a barrier)
You don't need what you are asking for...All you need is ME! **ILLUS:** "Show us the Father...will be enough...."
>God of Grace 1 Pe 5:10 "And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast."
>Throne of Grace: Heb 4:16 "Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."

>Word of Grace: Acts 20:32 *“Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up...”*
Illus: Rick Amato says: *“When you come to the place that Jesus is all you have, realize, Jesus is all you need!”*

- **Lean On Him:**
My Power Made Perfect in Weakness Lit = *is completed, consummated, finished or fulfilled*
>Paul is saying...as my weakness fades...God’s power increases...Inverse Relationship
>Divine power finds it’s full scope and power in weakness!
>Our weakness is the very playing field of the strength of God
>When I have fully surrendered, embraced the reality that I can’t, lying face down, exhausted, collapsed:
>At THAT POINT...God’s power is most fully revealed in my life!
>As long as I think I CAN...I CAN’T But when I realize that I CAN’T...I found out God CAN In ME!
- **Ask Him To Overshadow YOU**
When I am Weak: God’s Power “Rests” Upon me.
>Rests: Lit = to tabernacle...to tent upon! to descend and pitch a tent!
It’s an image from the OT, Where the shekinah glory of God, the cloud would descent upon the tent
And all the people would know God is HERE! He is PRESENT His power is available and at work!
Oh..we are not alone in this desert...with this thirst...with this hunger...with this fear
God has “tented” With us...and He will give us all we need!
- **Pay Attention to What He Promises:**
God gives us a promise...not an explanation!
My grace is enough...Is it?
Are you allowing it to be in your life?
Or, are you desperately trying to force things to be different?

A couple of critical questions:

CONCL: 1. How are you responding to God’s difficult work in your life?

>Bitter and Angry? >Give up? >Accept...and Embrace
>Buckle down? >Refuse to accept NO

2. When I the last time you really HEARD from Him?

Better...When was the last time you really LISTENED?
(Sat night come learn how....)

3. Are you willing to do the hard work of learning from tough times?

If you have never said before...Lord Jesus...I hear you say NO...and I embrace that!

I thank you for a gift...that I never really wanted...But since it comes from you...I welcome it...learn from it

4. Have you asked Him to “rest” on you in your struggle?

Have you asked him to Come and overshadow you with His power....meet you in your need?

If you never have...today can be the day...here ... on your knees...

It’s the story of all those that have walked with God before you....You wont be the first!

Job...Did it at home...with his wife and friends watching...God...I need you

Elijah...Did it in a cave...depressed...worn out...beat down...afraid for his very life

Moses...Did it at a burning bush...and by a rock...and on a mountain...with snakes around his feet!

Joshua...Did it in the tabernacle...and at the bank of a raging river...and around a fortified wall

David...did it in the desert...running for his life

Paul...Did it in jail...and in a storm at sea....with a deadly serpent attached to his body

Jesus...Did it on his knees...in a Garden one night...with his friends asleep...instead of watching

It’s something that only YOU can do...on your knees...before God...telling Him...

I CAN’T do this by myself anymore...God I NEED YOU will you come and tabernacle over me?

Send you spirit to abide...and dwell...and shadow me in the comfort and care of your grace

If you need to do that today...You come