God's Strength In Our Weakness

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[0:00] Let's read 2 Corinthians chapter 12 verses 1 to 10. Paul writes, I must go on boasting though there is nothing to be gained by it.

! I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord. I know a man in Christ who 14 years ago was caught up in the third heaven.
Whether in the body or out of the body, I do not know. God knows. And I know that this man was caught up into paradise.
Whether in the body or out of the body, I do not know. God knows. And he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter.
On behalf of this man, I will boast. But on my own behalf, I will not boast except of my weaknesses.
[1:02] Though if I should wish to boast, I would not be a fool. For I would be speaking the truth. But I refrain from it.

So that no one may think more of me than he sees in me or hears from me. And this is the section where we will spend most of our time. 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 also, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.
[2:21] For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities.

For when I am weak, then I am strong. Brothers and sisters, the message today is plain and delightful.
God's grace is sufficient. God's grace is sufficient. And when I am weak, I am strong.
Yes, His grace is sufficient. His grace is sufficient. What comforting words to the heirs of every believer.
The text we come to today has many implications and applications. This text, it argues against the core of the message of those who spread the prosperity gospel.
[3:40] God's grace is It reminds us that sometimes God says no to our requests. It demonstrates God's awareness of and concern for believers' challenges.

It makes clear that we can be at our best even when things are at their worst. It reminds us that God is sovereign.
It makes clear where the power is. It provides comfort in times of grief, disappointment, loss, and other challenges.
It calls us to have a godly perspective in every circumstance. The truth is this passage tells us so much that I can go on and on.
It tells us what God values. It tells us that His economy differs from the world's. The text we read might be summarized like this, using the words in the text itself.
[4:58] God's power is made perfect in our weakness. And our goal in preaching this message is to cause us to come to a place where we grab hold of those words now and into the future so that they might be an encouragement to us in times of challenges and difficulties.

I've organized my thoughts around two points. Our weaknesses and God's power. Paul writes to the church at Corinth with a heavy heart.
With a heavy heart. And yet Paul in this book is very, very personal. You will be aware that Paul was the author of much of the New Testament.

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And in some of the words that we've read Paul talks about the special revelation that he had. But this church, the church at Corinth at this time was experiencing some challenges, internal challenges.
Brotherly love was not on full display in this church. Heresy abounded in this church.
[6:45] people were varying away from the gospel. And then, if that weren't bad enough, they were questioning Paul's authority.

Indeed, all of this got back to Paul. Could you imagine this man who had given up much of what he had for the gospel.
But then he heard and he was aware of things that people others were saying about him. some said that his letters were weighty and strong but his bodily presence was weak.
They talked about the way he looked. They talked about the way he spoke. They talked about the fact that he was not among the original apostles.
They criticized him. Paul, in his defense, Paul says, you know what, allow me for a moment to be a fool.
[8:10] Let me tell you a little bit about myself. And Paul goes on and Paul says, is there a Hebrew? Well, I'm a Hebrew too.

they Israelites, so am I. Are they of Abram's seed? So am I.
Are they servants of Christ? So am I. And he says to them, I am truly none with far greater labor, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death.
Five times I received at the hands of the Jews, the 40 lashes, less one. Three times I was beaten with wards.
Paul goes on and on and on. And then he talks about his experience having this special vision. But Paul, this was obviously something that impacted him because Paul was just like you and me.
[9:31] Paul felt this. He felt the insults coming from those who he had ministered to, who he had encouraged, whose eyes the Lord used to help to open them to see and to understand and to accept the gospel.

His heart was heavy indeed. And it is within this context, within this heavy heartedness that Paul writes these words found in verses 7 and 8.
So to keep me from becoming conceited, because Paul remember he had in response to the church.
Paul had said to them, listen, you think I'm that? Well, this is the truth. Let me hold up for you. Let me boast a while. Let me become foolish and tell you who I really am.
And Paul realized that that's not what he ought to do. But he did it nevertheless. And then he came down and he says, to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations a thorn was given me in the flesh.
[11:08] A messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. And then in verse 8 he says, three times I pleaded with the Lord about this that it should leave me.

Paul writes here that the Lord had given to him a thorn in the flesh.
What he describes as a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep him from becoming conceited. Precisely what that was, I don't know.
And to be honest, I don't want to speculate because I don't think that that gets to the essence of the point. What I do know is that it was something that was undesirable.
It was something that bothered him to the point that he prayed about it. It was something that others knew about. It was something that Paul felt caused him to be humble in some respects.
[12:23] Paul writes here that he prayed about it.

I'm aware that like many you want to know what this thorn in the flesh was. But guess what? The truth is we all have weaknesses.
Something that we believe humanly speaking is holding us back from achieving a goal such as happiness or financial security, good health, social acceptance, popularity, and the list goes on and on.
man, if this were not the case I would do that. If that were not true about me I would come to the world or X, Y, Z. We all have weaknesses.
And Paul here, this man who wrote much of the New Testament talks about his weaknesses. Talks about this weakness in particular.

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[13:43] But as we consider this section of the Bible and we think about how this relates to us, how might we apply this to ourselves, I think it's important for us to get a better understanding of what Paul means when he refers here to weaknesses.

Because if we get that wrong we could get the entire thing wrong. See three times in the verses that we read Paul refers to weaknesses.
The Lord says my power is made perfect in weakness therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses. I am content with weaknesses.
But Paul is not here and this is important brothers and sisters Paul is not here talking about sin.
John Piper offers a great explanation about these weaknesses about which Paul writes.
Quoting John Piper he says he that is Paul is not talking about a kind of behavior like we might say he has a weakness for lust or she has a weakness for overeating.
[15:16] Paul is not talking about bad choices that we make. He is not saying that the power of Christ is perfected by bad choices or I will all the more gladly boast of my bad choices.

Weaknesses here are not imperfect choices. They are circumstances and situations and experiences and wounds that make us look weak.
Things we would probably get rid of if we had the human strength. I think it's important for us to understand that.
Indeed Paul gives us a list at the end of the section that we read though not exhaustive. I think it helps to point us in the right direction.
Paul says in this section I am content with weaknesses with insults with hardships with persecutions and calamities.
[16:34] But what weaknesses do you have? Do you have an economic weakness? Do you have a speech weakness? a physical weakness?

A health weakness? What weakness do you have? Perhaps it's one of those ones that has not yet been mentioned.
You know as I prepared this message and having regard for what Paul says because if you read closely what Paul said in this text Paul says the Lord gave me this thorn in the flesh and guess what it did?
It humbled me. And I thought to myself wouldn't it be wonderful if we all knew what the other person's weaknesses were?
Sometimes it's evident but sometimes it's not. You know something have you ever been around someone who looks like they have it all together?
[17:51] I gotta tell you that's a real difficult thing. That's a real difficult situation. And somebody seems like there's everything going well.

No concern in this area. No money concern. No relational concern. No health concern. Most popular. Most this.
Most that. I mean that's a those kinds of relationships are really really difficult because there you are little puny me with my challenges and here is Mr.
or Miss Perfect. But I gotta tell you Paul here the leader in the church says I got a weakness.
And I think he tells us he helps us to see by example that it's okay for us to share and to reveal our weaknesses.
[18:58] In fact it helps to bring us down to earth. It helps to add a little bit of humanity to us. So I want to encourage us to really listen let's share our weaknesses and as we go through this we gotta see how much even more important that is for us to do.

I got a weakness. You got a weakness. All God's people got weakness. Listen that's the way we are. All of us have weaknesses in one area or the other. Now but here's the truth though.
Here's the truth. There are some who say that believers should have no weaknesses. Now I know you've heard that. If you've been around as long as pastor has you have heard that.
And certainly if you do have weaknesses they say you shouldn't talk about it. But Paul writes a contrary view. His weakness has produced in him a sense of humility.
Otherwise he would be puffed up. That's what he says. Notice though how Paul responded to his weakness.
[20:14] This is really we got to grab a hold of this. Paul says in response to my weakness I prayed indeed he didn't say it quite that way.

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He said I pleaded with the Lord. Did you see that? Paul says I pleaded with the Lord and he didn't say he did it once. He said three times I pleaded with the Lord.
Now some commentators say that when Paul said he pleaded three times that's just a figure of speech.
It really means that Paul pleaded one time and two times and three times and over and over and over and over again.
maybe that's debatable but what we do know is that he pleaded with the Lord more than once more than twice at least three times at least three times and brothers and sisters that helps us to see that there's nothing wrong with us going to the Lord and repeating our requests and making our requests known to him over and over and over again and the Bible says the Bible Paul uses the words the word that he pleaded with the Lord Paul didn't go around you know just being comfortable with his weakness he he said Lord take this away from me the word pleaded suggests urgency and the heartfelt nature of his prayer he pleaded with the
[22:25] Lord and that leads me to my second and final point as we consider God's response and God's power Paul writes my grace is sufficient for you this is what the Lord responded to Paul's prayer for my power is made perfect in weakness therefore Paul says 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'm content with weaknesses insults hardships persecutions and calamities for when I am weak then I am strong the

Lord's response to Paul was no the Lord's response to the leader of the church to the apostle Paul who wrote much of the new testament was no let's face it you and I we don't go around talking about the lows that the Lord gives to us Paul here in a transparent way shares with the church at Corinth and with us that the Lord in response to his pleadings said no perhaps some of you might say like a good old bohemian that does not paint a good picture of the mind of
God but Paul is not too high minded to say that the Lord's response to him was a no but what do you do when the Lord says no what do you do when the Lord does not answer in the way that you would wish let's see how Paul navigates through this and see if there might be application for us the Lord says no Paul my grace is sufficient my grace is sufficient I believe someone here is hearing those words today and they're going to your soul my grace is sufficient in the midst of a trying circumstance my grace is sufficient but three questions come to mind when
I consider the response that Paul got when Paul hears these words from the Lord no my grace is sufficient the first one is what is grace the second is what is it sufficient to do and the third is why is it sufficient what is grace grace is the undeserved unerringed favor of God grace is what God gives us grace is the very power of God in second Corinthians nine verse eight we read and God is able to make all grace abound to you so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times you may abound in every good work what is grace sufficient to do in a sentence Paul says grace is the antidote to our weaknesses you have weaknesses then seek
God's grace Charles Spurgeon writing about the sufficiency of God's great rights this this sufficiency is declared without any limiting words and therefore I understand the passage to mean that the grace of the Lord Jesus is sufficient to uphold thee sufficient to strengthen thee sufficient to comfort thee sufficient to make thy trouble useful to thee sufficient to enable thee to triumph over it sufficient to bring thee out of it and sufficient to bring thee home to heaven God's grace is sufficient to bear you up when the weight on your shoulders seems too much to carry his grace is sufficient to give you peace in the midst of trying circumstances that cause others to faint and lose harm his grace is sufficient to give you hope for tomorrow even when the prognosis from the doctors is not what you would expect his grace is sufficient when the numbers don't add up in times of sadness his grace is sufficient to bring you joy in times of persecution his grace is sufficient to comfort you remember all of this is within the context of a no response to our pleadings the
[28:54] Lord says I won't remove it but my grace is sufficient I'm not going to take you out of this trouble I'm not going to heal your body but my grace is sufficient and the Lord answers no it is instructive to know that Paul writes that grace is sufficient present tense he could have said that grace will be sufficient or that grace was sufficient but he said it is grace brothers and sisters for you and for me grace is sufficient we pray that grace is sufficient grace is sufficient in every circumstance that we deal with every challenge that we have why is

God's grace sufficient God's grace is sufficient because the power of God is made perfect in our weakness after all it's his grace it gotta be sufficient if it were my grace or brother Tim's grace

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perhaps you might say it's not sufficient but it's God's and by definition his grace must always be sufficient there is a promise that accompanies the sufficiency of God's grace it is this God's power is made perfect in our weakness more often than not we want to get rid of the weakness but the Lord is saying my power is made perfect my power is made perfect in your weakness my power God's power is made perfect in your weakness why because your weakness brings you to a place of humility see what
Paul says in verse 7 God would rather you be humble and operating under his power than arrogant and operating under your own power his grace is sufficient and is made my power is made perfect in our weakness when you and I are weak and we thrust ourselves on the Lord and we said Lord we just can't do this we need your help and whatever you do Lord is well done my power is made perfect in your weakness why it's because the world sees our weaknesses and the world sees that we are not buried by them and guess what Jesus gets the glory
God would rather Jesus be glorified through us my power is made perfect in your weakness why because we are brought closer to God in our weakest moments when we are down and out and we don't know how the doctors are going to fix that problem or where the next dollar is going to come from or when people are saying things about us we run to the rock given all that Paul says therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses so that the power of Christ may rest upon me Paul says you know I can tell you remember the context now remember reframed it a little bit earlier remember that
Paul is responding to criticism from these people that he has been so kind to and he talks about his experiences but Paul says no no no I'm going to set that aside I would rather boast not about my achievements and my accomplishments rather I would prefer to boast about my weaknesses why because the power of Christ rests upon me oh if that were true about us today that we would rather boast about our weaknesses because there we stand in the midst of our weaknesses and we are able to testify that despite the challenges that we have God's power rests upon us Paul is saying [34:24] I've been places and I've seen things I've done this and that yet the grounds upon which I am prepared to boast are my weaknesses because they point to God Paul had come to a place where he was more reliant on the grace of God than his own strength Paul understood the frailty of the human body so he could not rely on his strength or good looks he knew well that charm and personality are so lost with familiarity he must have known that money was fleeting and power easily diminished but God's grace is eternal now we must be very careful as we navigate through these verses

I don't believe that weaknesses are to be desired we don't go around saying Lord give me some weakness today that if you do that that you know we got to pray for you we don't go around doing that Paul is not here saying that he welcomes weaknesses remember he prayed that they be removed we don't pray for we don't pray for hardship we don't pray for dirt we don't pray for lack we don't do that I don't believe that quantity that the quantity and the level of one's weakness is an indication of one's spirituality either that's not supported in scripture that is I don't believe that just because someone is really weak in one area or lacks certain things and that means that that person is more spiritual than the other either there are some people who believe that
Paul's point is this because I know that God's power is made perfect in weakness I am content knowing that I am actually stronger than if I had my way in other words Paul is content to have faith in God you and I need to come to a point like the apostle Paul where we take our weaknesses to the Lord and we are contented with the results I'd rather have the Lord's strength than my own wouldn't you I'd rather have the Lord's strength in times of difficulties in fact at any time than my own I'd rather rely on him than on me you see when the
Lord says no to us and then the Lord says that my grace is sufficient God you and I need to have the confidence that he is sovereign and he sees things that you and I cannot see he understands things that you and I will never understand he sees things he sees tomorrow in fact he sees an hour from now that you and I just can't see and it could very well be that a yes response could create a situation for you that you did not anticipate or it could very well be that the Lord chooses to use you in a certain way I'd rather have the Lord strength than my own so when brothers and sisters we are weak then we are strong because we know his power is made perfect in our weakness someone says that so with the apostle what seems to be an incapacitating conquest by
Satan's messenger is transformed into a triumph of grace and vindication of the sovereignty of almighty God seemed like Paul would be shrugged down but God used it for good God used it to

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demonstrate his sovereignty God used it to humble this man and how many of you know that all of us need a dose of humility as we conclude we must be sure of two things number one that the place of contentment in spite of weaknesses is arrived at through humility prayer and faith otherwise it's questionable

[39:55] I want to say that again the place of contentment in spite of weaknesses that are survived that through humility prayer and faith otherwise it's questionable you see some of us can say I am content and it can just be a mind thing but that's not what we are talking about here what we are talking about is spiritual it's tied to Jesus Christ it's tied to God our Father second point is that contentment in spite of weaknesses must be evidenced by our attitude and our behavior in other words you cannot claim contentment if you're always complaining and grumbling the evidence must be that Jesus Christ is glorified we say that again the point is this that you can't say that you are content with your weakness if all you do is complain about it and if all you do is grumble about it it must be your contentment must be evidenced by your behavior by your attitude and you must be desirous of bringing

Jesus Christ glory yes his grace is sufficient his grace is sufficient if his grace is sufficient to place us in right standing with him then it must be sufficient for life's challenges would you not agree with that could you imagine if God's grace was sufficient to bring us in right standing with him but it was not sufficient for life's challenges that would be questionable grace in brothers and sisters at all times but especially during times of weakness we ought to say like the apostle Paul his grace is sufficient can

I tell you that you ought to practice that because if you don't need it now one of these days you are going to have to say it God your grace is sufficient in this trying time your grace is sufficient and it doesn't matter who you are or what you have there's going to come a time in your life where these words are going to bring comfort to your heart your grace is sufficient sufficient I don't have what I need I don't have what I want my body is failing me right my relationship is on the rocks my co-workers are speaking ill of me your grace your grace is sufficient how many of you have ever had occasion to use these words your grace is sufficient your grace is sufficient in sickness in in sauce this is what

Paul writes in the concluding section of this passage Paul says in sickness grace is sufficient in sauce in hardships persecutions even and then if that were not enough Paul says and calamities you know what a calamity is something that causes great sudden distress Paul says even there his grace is sufficient bad diagnosis his grace is sufficient when I am weak I am strong because he holds me up he gives me power to endure God's power is made perfect in our weakness brothers and sisters you and

I have no reason to complain that's Paul's point his grace is sufficient let's pray father thank you lord today that your grace your grace is sufficient oh father lord we are aware that many of us going through trying and challenging times whatever that looks like lord for some lord it's a health condition for others lord it's a relational issue for some it's the loss of a loved one for others it's a financial challenge for some it's a reputational issue for others oh lord it's something even too hard to imagine but lord we know that you know what it is oh lord our prayer is that you would place in every heart the reality of these words that we preached about today that your grace is sufficient lord cause these words to come alive in every heart oh father let these words be true for us for the one who is broken today oh lord cause these words to be true your grace is sufficient father thank you for the sufficiency of your grace thank you for your power which is made perfect in our weakness thank you lord that you have drawn us to you oh what a privilege we have what a blessing lord we are blessed among men to know you thank you lord and all god's people say amen amen amen ho! ho

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