

"Cheer Up! God Wrote 2 Corinthians 12:9-10 Just For You!"
2 Corinthians 12:9-10
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In his biography about Jack Miller, author Michael Graham talks about how, in 1970, Jack Miller discovered that weakness was not a hindrance to doing ministry, but was in fact something that gave him an advantage. He writes,

"Now, Jack began to see his weakness as an advantage— as the occasion for prayer rather than as a hindrance to prayer... Jack would often laugh as he joyfully declared, 'Cheer up! You are far worse than you think you are'— which he always followed quickly with 'Cheer up! God's grace is far greater than you ever imagined.' And, while he is known for these two crucial statements, his 1970 breakthrough made it clear to him that they cannot stand apart from a third and equally important one: 'Cheer up! God's Spirit works in your weakness.'...The more Jack saw his helplessness and inability, the more he prayed; the more he prayed, the more open he became to God's promises and the more he relied upon the Holy Spirit's wisdom and strength to enable him to stand and move forward on the sure foundation that he had in Christ." (Cheer Up! The Life and Ministry of Jack Miller, p.58)

Jack Miller began to see his weakness as an advantage, not a hindrance. And it can be true for you too.

So,
CHEER UP! 'CAUSE WHEN YOU'RE WEAK, EXHAUSTED, WEARY, DEPLETED, AND YOU THINK YOU JUST CAN'T GO ON, THAT'S WHEN YOU'RE STRONG.

That's what we'll see in our passage today. So, turn in your Bibles to 2 Corinthians 12.

We're going to discover and re-discover that God's power is made perfect, His grace is sufficient in the worst experiences of our lives. And somebody here today just may need that promise. Somebody here came into church this morning just barely hanging on. Somebody came into church today feeling like you just can't go on one more day. And Jesus wants you to know that His power and His grace will carry you through what feels like the worst experience of your life. You can trust Him.

He wanted me to tell you today that He is with you and His grace is more than enough for you. You're gonna make it. Somebody here today needed that hope right at the beginning of the sermon.

So, let's rewind a few verses to set the context. Recall what we saw last week. Paul received this thorn in the flesh, he cried out to God for Him to remove it, and God basically said, *"No. Keep the thorn. I'll supply you with My grace, and you'll become an even more deep and profound pastor as you minister to others."*

The thorn stayed. Grace was given. And Paul was empowered in a way that he could not even imagine. And it's true for all of us as well. The same God and the same promise is available for us as well. After all, God wrote 2 Corinthians 12 just for you!

LOOK 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."

The Greek word that is translated "is sufficient" means, "to be enough, to satisfy, to be a match for." God was telling Paul that His grace was "enough." It was enough to sustain Paul every single day as he struggled with that pesky thorn. And recall, as we saw last week, that Paul has been struggling with the thorn for the past 14 years! Paul has experienced 14 years of normal discipleship:

Never-stopping, never giving up, unbreaking, always and forever thorn + Sufficient grace = Power in ministry.

That was Paul's new reality. Of course, Paul wanted changed circumstances. He wanted the thorn in the flesh to be taken away. In fact, he begged God 3x to take it away. But God told him, "My grace is sufficient for you. My grace is enough for you, even if I don't change your circumstances, even if I don't heal you, even if I don't remove the thorn- My grace is enough."

And what God said to Paul, He says to me and to you. God may say to you as you suffer, *"I'm never going to remove that thorn. You'll have it to the end. But, My grace, My power, My strength, My presence will be with you all the way. All that I am for all that you are suffering. And it will be through this weakness, through this never-stopping, never giving up, unbreaking, always and forever thorn that I will show My power in your life."*

You may want relief from what you are suffering right now. And who doesn't want relief from suffering? We all do. But, the relief may not come via the removal of your thorn. Relief comes through sufficient grace.

Listen, whatever you are going through right now, God has a purpose for you in it. Even if it feels hopeless. Jesus specializes in desperate situations. Jesus specializes in taking debilitating thorns and using them to bring good into His people's lives. The raw material that Jesus often uses to bring good into our lives is suffering and hardship and weakness and thorns that don't get removed. He uses our thorns to deepen us. That's where we learn, where we grow, where we become deeper and more profound people, and where we get to know God more, and where we are conformed more and more to the image of Christ.

All of this is simply the strange and perplexing ways of God! This is who our God is and what He does. He doesn't think the way we think. He doesn't do what we might do. He is perplexing! He'll make you scratch your head. He'll use a thorn to deepen you. Listen, if you haven't scratched your head at the perplexing ways of God, you might not be alive! God often does weird, confusing things that make you scratch your head. Scratching your head in confusion is a normal part of discipleship! To be a Christian, you have to be comfortable with scratching your head at the perplexing ways of God!

Because God's ways simply are not our ways. Here's how God thinks: *"My power is made perfect in weakness."* Huh? It's perplexing, but it's true: We are strong when we are weak. We grow as we experience hardships. We become deeper, more profound people as we suffer. And we don't think this way, do we? We would not dream up the ways of God. It's just so perplexing, isn't it? But we know it's true.

Elisabeth Elliot said, *"The deepest things that I have learned in my own life have come from the deepest suffering. And out of the deepest waters and the hottest fires have come the deepest things that I know about God."*

Suffering is *how* God deepens us and makes us deep people who aren't fickle. Suffering is where we come to know the deepest things about God. Suffering matures us, strengthens us, and that's exactly what the Corinthian church desperately needed. They needed depth, they needed maturity. They needed to know that God's power is made perfect in our weakness, not through mountain top experiences.

And if you're perplexed by God's mysterious ways of using suffering to deepen you and help you come to know God on a deeper level, then you might be perplexed by what Paul says next.

LOOK AT VERSE 10...

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. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

So, after praying three times and hearing a "No"- think about this for a second- God didn't remove the thorn this time for Paul, but how many thorns did God remove from Paul's life? How many thorns has Jesus removed for you over the course of your life? Probably a lot! How gracious of God! We don't get thorn after thorn after thorn and they all stay. He removes them. And sometimes, one has to linger for awhile...*or forever*. And when the thorns stay, He remains too. His presence remains with every thorn.

Let me ask you: Have you thanked Jesus for all the thorns that He *has removed* from your life? Today would be a good day to do that.

Well, Paul finally accepts the thorn's permanent place in his life. It's not going anywhere, so now what? What to do with this new living situation? Paul accepts it, but he moves beyond just a mere, *"So, it's the Lord's will that the thorn stays. Well, okay."* Paul begins to *delight* in his situation! Wow! Paul begins to boast and exult and rejoice in his weaknesses! Who does that? How can Paul boast and rejoice that he is weak?

Paul has learned that this is how we show that the surpassing power comes from God in our lives. We don't show God's surpassing power when we are strong and confident in our ourselves, or when we have mountain top experiences. We show His power when we suffer and we are sustained by His grace. When go through situations that we don't like. When we have to deal with people that we don't like. We show that the surpassing power belongs to God as we endure all of these things that we don't like.

And when you do that, you'll find yourself experiencing, in real-time, His surpassing power resting upon you. That's when God's surpassing power floods your life. When you come to grips with your "jar-of-clayness," that's when God's surpassing power will come and rest on you.

There's a reason why 2 Corinthians 12:9 is a much-loved verse, and why it's probably highlighted in your Bible: Because 2 Corinthians 12:9 is the normal Christian life! That's why it resonates with you.

So, embracing your weaknesses and rejoicing in them- *and not escaping them*- is the normal Christian life. You better get used to it. That's what it means to follow Jesus as a disciple: *weakness*. That's it. Owning your weakness, that's when you get connected to the Holy Spirit and His surpassing power. When you really feel anew that you're a jar of clay- that's what connects you once again to the surpassing power of the Holy Spirit.

Weakness is what actually qualifies us for God's *2-Corinthians-Chapter-12-Verse-9-Power-Made-Perfect-In-Weakness*. The thing that we don't want to be- *weak, needy, dependent, desperate*- that's what connects us to the surpassing power of God. So, why don't we just stop trying to be strong and impressive and formidable? Why don't we just embrace who we are and welcome surpassing power? But so often we just push back against our weakness, don't we?

We are allergic to weakness. We hate being needy. We want to be impressive, right? We want to come across to others as having it all together. We want to give the impression on social media that we are great and that we never struggle. We want people to think that we're great parents. And we have a great marriage. And we never struggle. And we never have issues. We want people to think that everything's great! We're like Tony the Tiger from *Frosted Flakes* cereal fame. We want people to look at us, and to see all the pictures we post online, and we want them to say about us, "*They're grrreeaaaattt!*"

We all want "Frosted Flakes discipleship," but that's not reality and we all know it! We all struggle. We are all needy. Our marriages and parenting and jobs and church life *always* are not what they should be. We are always weak. So, get over trying to be impressive. Get over always having to be formidable. Get over always having to have it together. And learn to be real. Be weak. And the real Jesus will meet you there. He doesn't meet you at the perfect *Instagram* post with that perfect filter and that perfect, winsome quote and *#blessed*. He meets the real you who brings your real weakness to Him.

Understand this: The Spirit's power is connected to our weakness. That's actually how Christianity works. They go hand in hand. So when you realize just how weak you are, that's the part you play in all this. All that you are called to be is weak. That's it. And then you connect your weakness to the Spirit's power. That's what 2 Corinthians 12:9 is all about. The Spirit comes and attaches Himself to our weakness. The Spirit is all about that *2-Corinthians-Chapter-12-Verse-9-Power-Made-Perfect-In-Weakness-Business*. That's what He lives for. The Holy Spirit loves to help weak people! It's one of his favorite things to do!

It's why Jesus gave the Holy Spirit a nickname in John 14:26-

But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.

When you embrace your weakness and just cry out for help, the Holy Spirit rushes in to do what He loves to do. He loves to help weak, desperate people! This is real Christianity! The super-apostles knew nothing of need and weakness. They were always formidable, always impressive, always had an answer for everything. Real Christianity is coming to Jesus with nothing but need. Just open, empty hands.

So-

CHEER UP! 'CAUSE WHEN YOU'RE WEAK, EXHAUSTED, WEARY, DEPLETED, AND YOU THINK YOU JUST CAN'T GO ON, THAT'S WHEN YOU'RE STRONG.

Cheer up because weak people are the Holy Spirit's favorite kind of people! God is not put off by your neediness! He does not sigh when you come weak and needy and helpless! He doesn't see you coming and say, "*Ugh, You again? Really? Geesh, can you not get it together for just once?*" He doesn't do that! He delights to see you embracing your weakness and running to Him. He delights to see you delighting in your weakness.

Your never-ending need is what qualifies you for His grace. He loves to help and He *only* helps weak people because that's how His surpassing power shines forth.

God's power is most fully displayed when you are weak. Let that sink in and believe it today! God's power is most fully displayed when you are weak. God's power is not most fully displayed through our swagger. But, the super-apostles, if you recall, had invaded the church at Corinth and they were preaching an "*always-be-powerful-always-be-impressive-always-have-an-answer-never-show-any-weakness-gospel*." They knew nothing of the Gospel's power. All they knew was trying to be impressive. But, genuine, Gospel-centered, authentic Christianity does not produce a race of superheroes who rise above need. Genuine, Gospel-centered, authentic Christianity produces weak, needy sinners.

Let me ask you today: Where are you weak? What are you unable to do in your own strength? Where do you feel helpless? Where do you feel desperate? Where do you need the Spirit to empower you? Do you feel overwhelmed today? Great! Awesome! That's the sweet spot! That's where you'll find the surpassing power of God invading your life! So, embrace it and ask Jesus for help, ask Jesus for power, and He will flood your life with it! You'll never

move beyond me this place of desperation. You'll never reach a place where you feel like you can handle it. This is Christianity. This is discipleship. Power made perfect in weakness. God's power most fully displayed through His overwhelmingly weak people. That's discipleship.

So, cheer up! The Holy Spirit's power is made perfect in your weakness.

LOOK AT VERSE 10 AGAIN...

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. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Paul is "content" with his weaknesses, but I think there's more to it than merely being content because the Greek word used here for *content* can also be translated "delight." It can be translated either way, but I think "delight" is what Paul is getting at it. That's how the NIV captures it. Paul said in verse 9 that he gladly boasts, gladly exults in his weaknesses, so I think he's saying once again that he *delights* in weaknesses insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities, and is not just merely *content* with them.

Do you have a category for that? Do you have a category for *delighting* in weaknesses, *delighting* in insults, *delighting* in hardships, *delighting* in persecutions, and *delighting* in calamities?

How can someone be glad and delight in suffering? How can someone be joyful that they are being used by God to display His glory and power? How can someone delight in all of these thorns?

The answer lies in 2 phrases that Paul uses: *so that* and *for the sake of*

Paul will boast and exult more gladly in his weaknesses so that the power of Christ rests upon him.

Paul will boast and exult more gladly in his weaknesses for the sake of Christ.

Paul has realized that his thorn and all of his sufferings are ultimately a billboard on which the glory of God will go on display. God uses His weak servants to showcase His power. God uses us *in the midst of our weakness* to display and glorify His power. Not by removing the pain or weakness or thorn, but by giving sufficient grace to endure.

And you can delight in whatever it is that you are going through today if it drives you to Jesus. Let it drive you to Jesus. Let it stir your heart to cry out to Jesus. And I'm not advocating that we celebrate pain and suffering and brokenness. We don't call what is evil "good." And I'm not saying we should ask for suffering to come our way. That's ridiculous. Please understand that. But what I am saying is that we can delight in our sufferings if they draw us closer to Jesus and His power rests upon us.

Paul Miller, who is the son of Jack Miller, who I mentioned earlier, says:

"Suffering isn't strange for Paul. He isn't merely enduring suffering, coping with it, or even learning from it— he's celebrating a life that re-enacts the cross and the empty tomb. Paul is describing the normal Christian life...We want our thorns to be over and done with. We recoil from repeated suffering. We much prefer one-time miracles, not the need for an ongoing miracle of a humble heart, but our ever-present flesh requires an ever-present solution: dying and rising with Jesus...Most Christians do not identify thorns very well. So a domineering mother, a lazy husband, or a sullen teenager are not seen as gifts that draw you into a real-time union with Christ. We focus on the thorn, and not on what God is doing through the thorn." (J-Curve, p. 99, 103-105)

We can either view the hardships and sufferings of life as opportunities to enter into real-time fellowship with Jesus, or we can go the other route, which will inevitably lead us to become angry, bitter, cynical, or despair.

The apostle Paul has learned the secret to boasting and delighting and exulting in his weaknesses. He doesn't dread them anymore. He doesn't run from them. He accepts them as part of what it means to be a disciple. He's not threatened in any way by them. Instead of dreading weakness and inadequacy, Paul delights in them! Listen, you can either live in dread of being weak and dependent, or, you can embrace it and delight in it. Which is better? Obviously the latter!

And Paul's "weaknesses" include the "thorn," whatever it was. But he adds more to the list of weaknesses: *insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities*. This means that Paul does not simply delight in the thorn, he also delights every time he is insulted and slandered and gossiped about! Imagine that! And he delights in all his hardships. I don't know about you, but this is not how I typically roll. And he delights when he is persecuted and experiences calamity. Wow.

Let me ask you to fill in the blank with what you are going through right now: "*I delight in weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, calamities, and _____.*"

What goes in that blank for you today? The Holy Spirit meets you right there, smack dab in the middle of that blank. Whatever you put in that blank, that's where the power of Christ rests upon you. The Holy Spirit is waiting for you, right there in that blank. Jesus is waiting for you right there. Just fill it in and His grace will be enough and His power will rest upon you. And understanding that truth gives you an advantage in life and ministry.

So,

CHEER UP! 'CAUSE WHEN YOU'RE WEAK, EXHAUSTED, WEARY, DEPLETED, AND YOU THINK YOU JUST CAN'T GO ON, THAT'S WHEN YOU'RE STRONG.

We're about to stand and sing these words, which is really what 2 Corinthians 12 is all about:

*I hear the Savior say, "Thy strength indeed is small;
Child of weakness, watch and pray, Find in Me thine all in all."*

That about sums it up. So, hear your crucified and risen Savior say to you today, "*Child of weakness, with all of your thorns, find in Me your all in all.*"