

Issue: The things that limit you might be the means by which God matures you

Change: Your response to your limitations

Benefit: Experience the power of God

...or because of these surpassingly great revelations. Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from 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 about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. 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 (2 Corinthians 12:7b-10).

What Should We Know About Paul's Suffering?

Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me (v. 7b).

In the flesh

- » His suffering was real ("flesh").
- » It was done to him; wasn't something that he did ("given").
- » It's some sort of reminder of his weakness. What the thorn **was** isn't as important as what Paul **learned** and **did** because of it.

Two purposes

- To torment ("messenger of Satan").
- To mature ("to keep from becoming conceited").

Emphasis: 2x in Greek (for his good; not on Satan's agenda).

The thing that torments him is also the arena in which God matures him.

What was Paul's Response?

Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me (v. 8).

Plea

"to ask to come and be present where the speaker is, call to one's side" (BDAG)

Take it away

- » Paul did not want the thorn.
- » He asked God three times to take it away.

What was God's Response?

But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (v. 9a).

- » God doesn't grant Paul's request.
- » Why wouldn't God want Paul released from his torment?

Example: your children; in their struggle you would want to do everything to remove the pain.

Maybe there is something more going on. What if removing the pain means removing them from an arena of growth?

What if the thing that hinders may actually lead to good?

God must have a better good for Paul than removing the pain.

Here is how God wants to transform Paul...

His Grace is Sufficient

- » What is grace here? The favor of God to sustain him.
- » "Rather than removing the problem, God gave him grace in it." (BK)

Power made perfect in weakness

"My power comes to full strength." (NET Notes)

When Paul was at his lowest, he was at his strongest.

God was at work in ways that surpassed Paul's ability.

This is a new way of how God is at work in the world:

- » those who...are at the end of the line...might be at the beginning of a new start.
- » those who...poured energy, time, money, dedication in their work, but still can't get ahead...might actually be moving forward.
- » those who...think they are far from God...might be closer than they could imagine.

In a world that despises limitation:

- » grace comes to the powerless, weak is no longer weak.
- » weak is the new strong.

Paul Learned a New Way to Respond

Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me (v. 9b).

Boast more gladly

Comparative form = "most gladly"

- » he boasts because he discovered a better way to respond.
- » Formerly: remove the pain, now; celebrate his limitations.

May rest on me

Compound verb; root means "to take up residence"

- » Paul wanted God to come near and remove the torment.
- » God came near and **gave** His grace.

Paul Practiced a New Response

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 (v. 10).

Delight

"Consider something as good and therefore worthy of choice."
(BDAG)

Because of this experience, he lives in a different way: when faced with difficulty he finds joy.

- » he wakes up with the flu and shouts for joy.

» he is sabotaged by a close friend and throws a party.

» people talk bad about him, block his path for advancement, seek his harm; a wide grin creeps across his face.

When I am Weak, Then I am Strong

Valley of Vision:

Let me learn by paradox

that the way down is the way up,

that to be low is to be high,

that the broken heart is the healed heart,

that the contrite spirit is the rejoicing spirit,

that the repenting soul is the victorious soul,

that to have nothing is to possess all,

that to bear the cross is to wear the crown,

that to give is to receive,

that the valley is the place of vision.

When you have nothing but grace, you have enough. When your strength is gone, God's strength has arrived.

Grace and power are gifts because of Jesus.

Grace is a gift, unfolding in your life in ways that you may not have noticed.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC South. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.