

Union Baptist Church  
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PROMISES OF GOD IN THE NEW TESTAMENT  
LESSON 7: The Promise of God's Strength in Weakness

**Key Scripture:**

*2 Corinthians 12:9 (NKJV) "And He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.'"*

**Biblical Context**

Paul wrote 2 Corinthians to a church where his authority had been challenged. His opponents valued outward strength, charisma, eloquence, and impressive spiritual experiences. Paul responds surprisingly: instead of defending himself with accomplishments, he points to his weaknesses.

The key scripture verse can be found in 2 Corinthians 12:1-9. He recounts an extraordinary spiritual experience - being caught up to the "third heaven" — but deliberately distances himself from it, speaking in the third person and refusing to sensationalize it (vv. 1-4). He wants the Corinthians to understand that spiritual legitimacy is not proven by dramatic experiences but by dependence on God's grace (vv. 5-6).

Paul then reveals that God allowed a persistent "thorn in the flesh" to keep him humble and dependent (v. 7). Though he pleaded three times for its removal, the Lord answered not with deliverance but with a promise: "**My grace is sufficient for you.**" (v. 9) This becomes the theological center of the passage. God's power is not displayed through human strength but through human weakness.

**Explanation of the Verses**

**1. Paul's Reluctant Boasting (vv. 1-4)**

*It is doubtless not profitable for me to boast. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord: 2 I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a one was caught up to the third heaven. 3 And I know such a man—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows— 4 how he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.*

Paul opens by admitting that boasting is unprofitable, yet he addresses "visions and revelations of the Lord" because his opponents used spiritual experiences to challenge his authority. He recounts the experience in the third person—"I know a man in Christ"—a rhetorical choice that signals his reluctance to draw attention to himself and critiques the Corinthians' fixation on spiritual spectacle. Though caught up to the "third heaven" and "Paradise," imagery for God's immediate presence, Paul refuses to sensationalize the event, emphasizing that he does not know whether it occurred "in the body or out of the body." He also withholds the "inexpressible words" he heard, declining to

exploit the revelation. In contrast to his opponents, Paul's restraint exposes the emptiness of spiritual showmanship and redirects attention from human impressiveness to Christ.

## **2. Truth Without Self-Exaltation (vv. 5-6)**

*5 Of such a one I will boast; yet of myself I will not boast, except in my infirmities. 6 For though I might desire to boast, I will not be a fool; for I will speak the truth. But I refrain, lest anyone should think of me above what he sees me to be or hears from me.*

Paul insists that the church should evaluate him not by dramatic experiences, but by what they can see in his life and hear in his teaching. He refuses to boast in anything except his infirmities, because weakness, not strength, is where God's power is revealed. These verses reinforce Paul's consistent emphasis that true spiritual authority is grounded not in self-promotion or extraordinary experiences, but in integrity, humility, and visible faithfulness to Christ.

## **3. The Thorn in the Flesh (vv. 7-8)**

*7 And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. 8 Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me.*

Paul explains that a "thorn in the flesh" was given to him to prevent him from becoming prideful because of his extraordinary revelations. Though he calls it a "messenger of Satan," he recognizes that God permitted it for a redemptive purpose. The thorn is intentionally ambiguous—physical, emotional, spiritual, or relational—because the point is not the nature of the thorn but the purpose of the thorn. Paul "pleaded" with the Lord three times for its removal, language that conveys the severity and persistence of his suffering.

## **4. The Sufficiency of Grace (v. 9)**

*9 And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.*

God answers Paul's prayer with a promise rather than deliverance: "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness."

Paul's thorn was not removed, but it was repurposed. What felt like a liability ultimately became a testimony. Christ's power "rests upon" Paul, a phrase that evokes God's glory dwelling with His people in the Old Testament tabernacle. Weakness becomes the place where divine strength becomes visible. Paul thus portrays Christ's power as an abiding, divine presence that dwells with him precisely in his weakness.

This truth speaks directly to believers who feel overwhelmed by responsibility, stretched by life's demands, or discouraged by ongoing struggles. Christ's power is not most visible when we appear strong—it is most visible when we depend on Him.

## **5. The Paradox of Strength (v. 10)**

*10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*

In verse 10, Paul draws out the practical implication of the Lord's assurance, summarizing the

paradox with the statement, “For when I am weak, then I am strong.” True strength, for Paul, comes not from self-sufficiency but from dependence on Christ. When he is most aware of his weakness, he relies most fully on God’s grace, and it is there that Christ’s power is most clearly at work. Weakness thus becomes the means by which genuine spiritual strength is revealed.

Paul’s testimony is not theoretical. It is lived. He pleads for relief, receives a “no,” and discovers a deeper “yes”—the sustaining presence of Christ. God’s grace does not always remove the struggle, but it always supplies strength for the struggle. Weakness becomes the place where dependence grows, courage deepens, and Christ’s presence becomes unmistakably real. You do not endure because you are strong, you endure because Christ’s grace is sufficient.

### **Contemporary Summary**

Paul’s message speaks powerfully into our modern world, where strength is often measured by success, confidence, and self-sufficiency. Many believers feel pressure to appear strong, competent, and unbothered. But Paul teaches that God’s grace is most fully experienced not in triumph but in weakness.

The challenges we wish God would remove—chronic pain, anxiety, strained relationships, financial pressure, discouragement—may become the very places where Christ’s power is most clearly displayed. When believers stop disguising their weakness and trust and depend daily on God’s sufficient grace, they discover that true strength does not come from within themselves, but from a life anchored in Christ. In this way, hardships can be transformed from liabilities into testimonies of God’s sustaining power and faithfulness.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. How does Paul’s statement, “When I am weak, then I am strong,” challenge common ideas about strength, success, or spiritual maturity?
2. How should knowing that God’s grace is “sufficient” affect the way believers think about their own limitations or hardships?
3. Are there areas of your life where God may be inviting you to acknowledge your weakness?
4. How might embracing weakness become a testimony to others of God’s strength and faithfulness?
5. What practical steps can believers take to rely more fully on God’s grace in daily life?

### **Memory Verse**

“My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.”  
2 Corinthians 12:9 (NKJV)

Write it. Memorize it. Live it.

## STUDENT WORKSHEET

### Lesson 7: The Promise of God's Strength in Weakness

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Read 2 Corinthians 12:1-10 and complete the following questions:

#### SECTION A: MULTIPLE CHOICE

Circle the letter of the best answer.

1. Why does Paul describe his visions using the third person (12:2)?
  - A. He doubts the experience
  - B. He wishes to avoid drawing attention to himself
  - C. He is referring to another apostle
  - D. He is quoting a known tradition
2. Where does Paul say the man in Christ was caught up (12:2, 4)?
  - A. Mount Sinai
  - B. Heaven and earth
  - C. The third heaven, called Paradise
  - D. The temple in Jerusalem
3. What was given to Paul to prevent him from becoming conceited (12:7)?
  - A. A rival teacher
  - B. A vision of judgment
  - C. A thorn in the flesh
  - D. A period of suffering
4. How many times did Paul plead with the Lord to remove the thorn (12:8)?
  - A. Once
  - B. Twice
  - C. Three times
  - D. Continually
5. What does Paul choose to boast in rather than his revelations (12:9–10)?
  - A. His obedience
  - B. His weaknesses
  - C. His ministry successes
  - D. His faithfulness
6. Why is Paul's "thorn in the flesh" important for understanding Christian ministry?
  - A. It shows that spiritual leaders should appear strong
  - B. It shows that God's power can work through ongoing weakness
  - C. It proves Paul lacked faith
  - D. It explains why Paul stopped serving

SECTION B: TRUE OR FALSE

7. Paul says he understands whether his experience was in the body or out of the body (12:2).

\_\_\_\_\_ True      \_\_\_\_\_ False

8. God removed Paul's thorn in response to his prayers (12:8).

\_\_\_\_\_ True      \_\_\_\_\_ False

9. Jesus tells Paul that His grace is sufficient (12:9).

\_\_\_\_\_ True      \_\_\_\_\_ False

10. Paul views weakness as an obstacle to Christ's power (12:9–10).

\_\_\_\_\_ True      \_\_\_\_\_ False

11. Paul concludes that when he is weak, he is strong (12:10).

\_\_\_\_\_ True      \_\_\_\_\_ False

SECTION C: PERSONAL REFLECTION

Answer in 3–5 sentences.

Paul teaches that God's power is made perfect in weakness. Identify one area of your life where you sense God inviting you to acknowledge your weakness. How might that area become an opportunity for God's strength to be revealed?

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