

Just Enough Grace

2 Corinthians 12:1-10

MEMORY VERSE

2 CORINTHIANS 12:9

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.

WHAT YOU WILL NEED:

A fresh cut, long stem rose with thorns on it and a thick glove.

Two large button-up shirts, two pairs of large gloves and masking tape.

A “My Grace is Sufficient” template, scissors, glue sticks, various colors of tissue paper, extra sheets of paper and markers or crayons.

ATTENTION GRABBER!

Thorns and Grace

For this activity you will need a fresh cut, long stem rose with thorns on it and a thick glove. Show the class the rose and talk about how beautiful the flower is. Next ask the children what else they notice about the rose. They should quickly note that rose has thorns. Ask, “What happens if I grab the stem?” (I will be pricked by a thorn!). Next ask, “How can I deal with these thorns?” (children may answer in various ways). Ask, “What if I put on a glove?” (I’ll be protected from the thorns).

Explain that in our lesson today we are going to learn about Paul and a time when he had a “thorn in the flesh.” It was kind of like holding onto the rose stem for a very long period of time. But we will also find that while God chose not to remove the thorn from Paul, He certainly did help him. He gave Paul His grace. And like the glove that we put on to protect ourselves from the thorns on the rose stem, God’s grace will protect us from the effects of thorns in our lives. **God helps us when we suffer.**

LESSON TIME!

This week we are going to learn about grace and suffering. The apostle Paul knew a lot about these two very important parts of being a Christian. He knew that grace was necessary in order to suffer for Christ and that suffering would be part of his following the Lord, but Paul also knew that **God helps us when we suffer.**

2 CORINTHIANS 12:1-3

It is doubtless not profitable for me to boast. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord:

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.

And I know such a man—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows—

Paul is describing here an experience that God gave to him; he actually was taken up into heaven. Wow! This is isn't where the clouds are, but this is the third heaven where God sits on His throne. The Bible does speak of three heavens. It speaks of the atmosphere around the earth as the birds flying in the heaven. It speaks of the celestial heavens as God placed the sun and the moon and the stars, in the heavens—the limitless expanse. It also speaks about the dwelling place of God, that place in the universe where is the throne of God, the actual place of God's dwelling, His throne in the heavens. So, the Bible makes mention to the three heavens, the atmosphere, the celestial heaven and the dwelling place of God.

Imagine if that was you or myself!

Could we not think we were pretty special for getting a glimpse of heaven? But Paul knows that he had nothing to do with these visions and that is why he tells us in verse 1 “it is doubtless not profitable for me to boast.” He wants us to understand that he cannot take the credit for this wonderful thing that happened to him; he does not even want to mention that it was himself that it happened to. That is how much Paul wanted to stay away from boasting.

When God shows us something special, it's not for us to bring attention to ourselves and brag about it. Paul was just like you and me. God had a special job for Paul to do while he was still on this earth. The Lord wanted to use Paul to get the gospel of Jesus Christ out to the world. God knew that Paul was going to go through a lot of hard things doing this job, but **God helps us when we suffer.**

2 CORINTHIANS 12:4

how he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.

Awesome! This vision of Paradise that Paul saw was so spectacular he could not even put it into words. But why did the Lord choose to show Paul these things? It was because of His grace towards Paul. God chose Paul to be a special messenger (an apostle) to share the gospel of Jesus. Also, God was going to use Paul to write much of the New Testament. So God chose to give Paul special revelations of Himself and of heaven. But Paul never became puffed up with pride, and as we will see later, God helped him with that in the form of suffering. But even while suffering, Paul learned that **God helps us when we suffer.**

God chose to encourage Paul by this vision, to keep him pressing toward the goal, (Philippians 3:14) and not to lose heart. That is how much God loves you and me. He does not ask any one of us to do something that He will not provide all the grace and strength necessary to do it. **God helps us when we suffer.**

When we are called to suffer, as Paul was, and you and I will be at times as well, we have God's promise that He will give us just enough grace to get through it. In Romans 5:8 we are told "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." God does not have to show us anymore about His grace than Jesus dying on the cross, but He does. We will never be able to fully understand the depths of the grace of God.

2 CORINTHIANS 12:5-6

Of such a one I will boast; yet of myself I will not boast, except in my infirmities.

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 is showing us how he has thoughts just like you and I. In verse 5 he tells us, "...I might desire to boast..." yet he knows if he does he will be a fool. Just like Proverbs 15:2 "the tongue of the wise uses knowledge rightly, but the mouth of fools pours forth foolishness." Paul never saw himself as being above others. As a matter a fact the only thing he would boast in were his infirmities (sufferings) in verse 5. **God helps us when we suffer.** Paul did not want others to worship him, rather he wanted all the glory to be given to the Lord.

2 CORINTHIANS 12:7

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.

What were these infirmities (sufferings) that Paul was referring to? We are not quite sure. It may have been some kind of physical affliction (suffering). Or it may have been something within Paul that was very difficult for him to deal with. The Bible does not specifically tell us what it was. But we do know that it was given to him by the Lord in order to keep Paul humble.

Remember back in verse 5 Paul shared how he might desire to boast in this awesome revelation that the Lord had given him? That tells us that Paul was tempted with pride just like you and I can be. The Lord knows everything in our heart and He knows what will keep us humble. God knew Paul needed this thorn in the flesh to keep him dependent upon the Lord. **God helps us when we suffer.** Have you ever held a rose and had a thorn stick your finger? It really hurts and it can stick in our skin very easily, this is how Paul was describing this difficulty in his life.

But the word used for thorn in this verse actually means that it was like a stake that would be driven into something, his flesh. Now that would be very painful. So whatever this thorn was, we know for a fact that it was a big thing in Paul's life and it was a painful thing.

Just because we are Christians that does not mean that we will never have any difficulty or pain. Sometimes people might get angry at God because they are having a difficulty. But the teaching of the Bible is that God is in control and He can, and often does use painful things in our lives to teach us valuable lessons.

Many people who walk with the Lord may have a "thorn in the flesh" of some kind. It is different for everyone, because it is based on what God knows our needs to be. It is interesting that the Bible does not tell us exactly what Paul's thorn in the flesh is. If it said Paul had eye problems, then maybe people going through something different would not receive as much comfort. By not sharing exactly what it is many people have been comforted over the centuries.

It is such a blessing how the Lord ministers and helps each of us individually. But the one thing that is true for all of us, no matter who we are, is that **God helps us when we suffer**. If you are suffering in some way remember that the Lord loves you and desires to help you. Pray continually asking Him for the grace you need to get through the difficult time.

The Bible also calls this thorn (allowed by the Lord) a messenger of Satan (verse 7). Satan's purpose was to try to stop Paul from preaching and teaching the Word of God. Satan was hoping that this suffering Paul was going through would make him unusable for the Lord, but God used it to remind Paul that His power would work through this weakness.

Satan will use all kinds of ways to try to stop us from serving the Lord. He will even use people around us who do not believe God is working in our suffering. This happened to the man of God, Job. Remember how the Lord took everything from him? In the second chapter of Job, Satan was allowed to destroy Job's health, he was hoping this would make him curse God. Satan even tried to use Job's wife when she told him in Job 2:9, "Do you still hold fast to your integrity? Curse God and die!" But Job held true to the Lord. The devil will try anything and anyone to bring us down whenever he can, but we always need to remember that **God helps us when we suffer**.

The Thorny Relay

For this relay race you will need two large button-up shirts, two pairs of large gloves and masking tape. Divide the class into two equal teams and mark off with masking tape a starting line. On the other side of the room have two tables with the shirts laying on them un-buttoned.

Explain to the children that when you say, "go" that the first person in each line should put on the pair of gloves and run to the table with the shirt. They need to put on the shirt and button the top three buttons. Next they need to un-button it and place the shirt back on the table. Then they can run back to their line and give the gloves to the next child in line who will in turn do the same. Continue play until there is a winner.

This time the glove represents difficult things in our lives, instead of grace like in our attention grabber. Sometimes we have a task to do, even something that is good and given to us by the Lord. Then at the same time we have a trial or a problem, a thorn in our lives that might try to keep us from doing what we need to do. It was much harder to button the shirt with the gloves on. It was also harder for Paul to do what God had called him to do with his thorn in the flesh, but God also gave him the grace he needed.

2 CORINTHIANS 12:8-9

Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me.

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.

Once again Paul shows us that he is human like you and I. He was hurting and wanted the pain to go away. He pleaded (he cried out with his whole heart to the Lord) to take away this hurt and the way the Lord answered was probably not easy for Paul. Instead of God taking this weakness away from Paul, the Lord gave him strength through His grace. The grace of God is to have His strength. Wow! Imagine being able to have a very difficult affliction or problem and God tells you He is not going to take it away but give you something much more wonderful. He is going to give you HIS POWER by HIS GRACE to endure it!! **God helps us when we suffer.**

The Lord works in people today like He worked in Paul's life. There are people who are suffering, yet when you meet them they are so joyful you would never know anything is difficult in their life. As a matter of fact I knew a very special boy that loved the Lord very much and he was born with a lot of medical problems. He was always going in and out of the hospital and definitely knew what it was like to have a thorn in the flesh. Yet, every time I would see him he was joyful and loving the Lord for how He made him. As he was not angry or bitter at God, he was truly filled with God's grace to endure and be a mighty witness to all around him. He knew most of all that God loved him and **God helps us when we suffer.** I am sure there were plenty of times that this boy pleaded with the Lord to be healed but God said, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” And to meet this boy you would think that he had a very special gift from God through his medical problems. He boasted in his infirmities just like Paul.

This is what the Lord is telling us in this scripture through the apostle Paul. No matter how painful and weak we are, that is when God is truly working out His strength by His grace. **God helps us when we suffer.**

2 CORINTHIANS 12:10

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.

We cannot earn God's grace; His grace means that we are getting what we do not deserve. It is receiving His power to save us from a life eternally in hell. It is receiving His forgiveness when we truly deserve to die because we have sinned against Him. His Grace is His power and strength to get us through whatever may come into our lives. The Lord will give grace to any one who calls upon Him in the name of Jesus. Paul knew that everything difficult and painful he was going through in this life was totally worth it just to have God's grace. The Lord is telling you and me the same message today just as He was telling the Corinthians, **God helps us when we suffer.**

The world does not understand how people like Paul or the boy mentioned in our lesson can actually take pleasure in suffering, because the world does not understand the grace of God and the power of His strength in a life that is totally committed to Him. But what a witness for Jesus Christ the lives of Paul and this boy are! These two people were not perfect, they just knew they were weak and let God be strong for them. **God helps us when we suffer.** Not only were they a witness to unbelievers of the power and grace of God, they are examples of encouragement to us when we suffer.

My Grace is Sufficient

For this craft you will need a "My Grace is Sufficient" template, scissors, glue sticks, various colors of tissue paper, extra sheets of paper and markers or crayons.

Each template makes two crafts. Give each child a 1/2 sheet from the template. Have them cut out the inside of the letters "GRACE." Set aside. On another 1/2 sheet of paper the same size take some tissue paper (various colors and torn into strips) and glue them onto the paper. Explain to the children that the torn tissue paper is like trials and problems in our lives. It can look like things are out of control and our problems are going to get the best of us. Paste the strips in various directions on the paper. Things can look like a big mess. But God has a way of making a mess something beautiful.

Take the template that says grace and cover the strips of tissue paper. Glue it into place. Now we have a beautiful craft that says, "GRACE." This will help us to remember that God's grace is sufficient for us. Next, using markers or crayons decorate your craft around the word, "GRACE."

PRAYER

Lead the children in a prayer of thanksgiving to the Lord for providing help to us when we suffer. They can also pray to commit to go to the Lord for help when they are suffering through a trial. If there are any children who have not yet responded to the gospel, give them opportunity to do so.

GRACE

GRACE