

# WINNING THROUGH LOSING

## 2 CORINTHIANS 12:1-10

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

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. 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. 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.

The Atlanta Falcons have played football since 1965.

Being a lifelong Atlantan the Falcons have been my go-to team my whole life. I've cheered 52 years for a franchise that's played in just one measly Super Bowl.

That's why tonight's big game, the Falcons versus the Patriots is so huge. *And I have a bold prediction...*

*Want to hear my prediction?* After the game, in the winning team's locker room, several players will thank God for the victory - they'll credit God for their success!

Whether they're in red uniforms or blue uniforms the winning players will claim the victory was their destiny all along - it was *God's will* for them to win the game!

*You hear this from the winners of all football games.*

But here's what you won't hear... no one in the losing locker room will give God credit for their loss.

None of the 53 losers will claim that losing was *their* destiny - coming up short was *God's will* for their team.

Lots of players thank God for a win. No one thanks Him for a loss. Apparently, *the god of sports* reveals himself only when you win. *Not so with the true God!*

The God of the Bible shows up *especially* in a loss.

And nowhere is this taught more clearly than in 2 Corinthians 12. Our text puts an exclamation point on the truth that's been repeated over and over in Paul's letter: *God's power is revealed in our weakness.*

This was the theme from the outset of 2 Corinthians.

In 1:8 Paul opened the letter, "we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life."

Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead.” From the outset Paul contends that God uses our losses, trials, fears, fits of depression all as a backdrop for His works of grace.

In Chapter 2 he pictures Christians as conquered slaves in the victory parade of our triumphant General Jesus. *Our loss, our surrender* brings the Master glory.

Again in 4:7 Paul observes, “We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us.” God puts spiritual riches in simple clay jars - in humans - so the attention is on the treasure, not on the container in which it resides.

Then again in Chapter 6 Paul highlights his scars: “in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in fastings...” It was at the point of his greatest weakness, that God validated Paul’s ministry.

This thread runs through the entire tapestry 2 Corinthians. He argues losses and setbacks are not a bad thing. To the contrary, it’s our weakness that provides God an opportunity to prove Himself strong.

And this is how Chapter 11 ends. Paul was boasting of his ministry - not about his accomplishments, but about what the world would call his “losses” - “in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths often.” Paul describes specific beatings, shipwrecks, attacks, constant exhaustion.

Then he sums up his ministries’ “achievements” with an

episode that occurred shortly after his conversion.

Paul took part in a covert operation to escape from Damascus. He was let down from the wall in a basket.

It was Paul's way of saying, that rather than being a great hero, he was really just *a basket case*. When measured against earthly standards his ministry was *a let down*, literally. Yet this was Paul's theme, *it's when God's servants are weakest, that God is the strongest*.

And here in 12:9 we rise to the summit of his letter, it's Paul's crescendo. When God's servant, Paul, prays for relief from his most enduring trial and agony, God answers him - *"Be healed!" "Claim your victory now! Believe and receive!"* No, no, that's not what He says!

Jesus the Great Physician, who could've healed Paul if He'd chosen, answers instead, *"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."*

If the Falcons lose tonight none of us will be happy, but a loss won't stop God from revealing Himself in powerful ways. In fact, it's what often sets the stage!

Chapter 12, *"It is doubtless not profitable for me to boast."* Paul doesn't like the fact that for two chapters all he's talked about is himself. The only time Paul was comfortable boasting, was if he boasted in the Lord.

But false teachers in Corinth were attacking the credibility of Paul's ministry and message. These men arrogantly called themselves *"super apostles."* To stand up for the Gospel, Paul was forced to defend himself.

Yet it was awkward, and he felt clumsy doing it.

It's like an evening at a friend's house, when after dinner the host says, "Let's watch some family videos!"

*Nooooo!* Please don't subject me to home movies!

This is how you ruin a wonderful visit. *Bore me silly.* Hey, nobody likes reliving moments, not their own.

And this was the reason Paul was reluctant to boast about his ministry. Even when he had to defend himself he did so in a humble, unassuming manner. Rather than point to what the world would call "wins" - he bragged about his "losses" - his sufferings for Jesus.

Here was his logic... If he wasn't **sincere** why would he endure such trials? And if he wasn't **successful** why did the enemy try so hard to stop him? For Paul it was his *scars and losses* that proved his sincerity.

But now in Chapter 12 even a mention of his hardships seems out of place for Paul. In light of Jesus' sufferings for us, his sufferings seemed quite trivial.

So instead of speaking anymore about his *physical buffeting* Paul will change the subject. He goes from *collisions* to *visions*. From *getting beat up for Jesus*, to *being picked up by Jesus*. He continues in verse 1, "I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord..."

And Paul received some *heavy revvies* from Jesus.

Realize, Paul was a mystic at heart. He sought spiritual illumination. Yes, He lived with *his feet* firmly on the ground, He kept *his nose* studiously in the Bible, but he also kept *his*

*head and heart* in the heavens.

Paul often relied on divine revelation from the Lord. The Holy Spirit communicated to Paul directly.

I heard of a man who picked out the prettiest rose for his bride-to-be. The girl though, didn't want the flower.

The groom was so enamored with the rose's beauty, he'd overlooked the fact the flower had no scent. The rose had no fragrance. His fiancée knew it immediately, she was more observant... *she was blind.*

Her other senses weren't overwhelmed by what she saw - *and neither was Paul.* He looked past situations, and was sensitive to the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

On countless occasions Paul received from God divine guidance and supernatural assistance... *He was converted when the Lord appeared to him on the road to Damascus... At Troas he saw a vision of a man from Macedonia calling for him to cross the Aegean Sea and preach the Gospel in Europe... And during a storm at sea an angel came to Paul with needed assurance...*

Certainly, we need to read our Bible for guidance.

God's Spirit will never contradict His Word. But God can also confirm His Word, even augment His Word, with specific guidance and supernatural instructions.

Be discerning of dreams, visions, angelic visitations - *but be open.* Don't just look, be ready to smell as well.

In verse 2 Paul writes, **"I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago..."** Paul is so uncomfortable with his boasting, here

he resorts to speaking in third person.

This was a literary device at times used among the rabbis. It was a way of deflecting the glory off oneself.

**“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.”** Here Paul elaborates on one of the spiritual experiences God gave to him.

Since we’re uncertain as to when Paul penned 2 Corinthians, it’s impossible to pinpoint 14 years earlier.

*It could be at the end of his preparation for ministry in his hometown of Tarsus... Or, during his stay in Antioch before launching his first missionary journey... Or on the trip, while preaching in the town of Lystra...*

In Acts 14 Lystra was the site of Paul’s stoning. An angry mob pelted Paul with rocks and left him for dead.

At the time, Paul wasn’t sure if he was, **“in the body... or out of the body...”** He may’ve been dead or just near-death - he wasn’t sure - but he was **“caught up.”**

This is the Greek word used to describe the rapture. Could it be God arranged **a mini-rapture** for Paul?

Maybe his body was whisked off to heaven, then brought back. Or, his body might’ve been under a pile of rocks, while his spirit was transported to heaven. This could’ve been a true *out-of-body experience*.

What impressed Paul though, was not what happened to him, as much as what he saw and heard. God gave to Paul a glimpse of **“the third heaven.”**

Heaven #1 is the blue sky - earth's atmosphere.

Heaven #2 is the starry sky - or outer space.

*“The third heaven”* is literally out-of-this-world! It’s in a spiritual dimension. Incredibly, Paul was caught up into the presence of God - into His very throne-room.

Modern technology enables man to travel to the first two heavens on his own, but we can't reach the third heaven without God’s permission and His transport.

Like He did with Isaiah, and Ezekiel, and John on the Isle of Patmos, God gave Paul a peek into heaven.

God knew all that Paul would endure for Jesus’ sake. He knew it would be impossible for him to withstand fierce *persecutions on earth*, without a profound sense of the *glories of heaven*. This vision was preparation.

Paul repeats his astonishing testimony in verse 3...

*“And I know such a man - whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows - how he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.”*

I love the term Paul uses to describe God’s throne-room. *“Paradise”* is a Persian word which refers to *“a walled garden.”* Wealthy desert sheiks would dig deep wells. They’d import lush flowers, and shade trees, and spice bushes to plant around the spring. Then they’d enclose their garden with a wall. It was a private oasis.

And this is the picture the Bible provides us of heaven. Jesus told the thief on the cross, *“Today you will be with Me in Paradise”* - *it’s the same word*. Jesus promised the crucified

thief an oasis - an eternal spa.

Forget about sterile, white hospital corridors - or a barge of fluffy clouds floating in thin air... that's not heaven. Heaven is a garden - full of rich greenery, thick shade, cool streams, delicious fruit, tantalizing smells.

Tahiti, Hawaii, the Caribbean combined can't touch heaven. It'll be a new and better Garden of Eden!

It's mind-boggling to realize Paul was given the same privilege as the first man Adam - he walked with God in the garden. He heard mysteries explained by God Himself. Paul had literally been to heaven, yet check it out, **he stayed silent about it for 14 years!**

And this is the real miracle... *Paul's restraint.*

Most preachers would've jumped on the talk-show circuit to speak of their experience, or publish a book about it, or launch "[paradise.org](http://paradise.org)." They would've at least mentioned it in their fundraising letters.

Yet what Paul saw and heard at God's throne was too sacred, too holy to be reduce into earthly terms.

This is what makes me so suspicious of preachers today who lay claim to supernatural experiences.

If Paul the wordsmith, the man God chose to pen the lofty theology of the NT, stayed silent for 14 years. If he felt his feeble expressions couldn't do heaven justice - *who are they to flaunt their visions and revelations?*

When you really do see the glory of God you're hushed - *speechless*. God, takes your breath away!

Few of us have received a vision like Paul, but the Bible does give us bits and pieces of what heaven is like. It's colorful, it's brilliant - despite lightning and thunder it's amazingly peaceful - there's the throne, there's the praise, there's the songs, there's the Lamb!

Trust me, no one will be disappointed with heaven.

I don't know all it will hold, but we certainly won't long for anything we left on earth. *Heaven will be heavenly.*

And God knows before we *begin* ministry we need a vision of how it will *end*. It's hard to endure the *rigors of serving God now* without a picture of the *end reward*.

Paul continues in verse 5, “Of such a one I will boast; yet of myself I will not boast, except in my infirmities.”

Again, because of his humility, Paul was far more at ease discussing *his low points* where he cried out to God, than *his high points* when God spoke to him.

He says, “For though I might desire to boast...” Like all of us, there was something in Paul that liked some attention. He enjoyed boasting a bit. It was nice for others to know *where he'd been* and *what he'd done*.

But when he remembered that *what he'd done* was by God's power and grace, any boasting was foolish.

Paul says, “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.”

Rather than try to impress people with *what he'd done* - **which was a lot** - or *where he'd been* - **he'd been to heaven**

**no less** - Paul was content to be *who God made him*. He spoke of his heavenly experience here because it was true, not to inflate his reputation.

And yet God knew Paul's tendency. In fact, He knows all men are prone to pride. Especially someone with Paul's privileges. Put yourself in Paul's shoes. **You work a miracle, or get a sneak peek into heaven, and see if you don't drop it in your next conversation.**

It's easy for all of us to get the big-head, and especially when privileged... Whenever we boast, or talk about ourselves - even if it's to defend our faith, or validate our God-given ministry - it becomes a risky proposition. Pride is such a subtle, sneaky enemy.

And this is why God took steps to guard against it in Paul's life. In verse 7 he writes, **"And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations (lest it go to my head and inflate my pride), a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure."**

Along with all Paul's *revelations* God gave him one *aggravation*. To keep his feet on the ground while his head was in the heavens, God gave him a **thorn** to reel him in, and keep him conscious of his neediness.

And this was more than a pebble in his shoe, or a splinter in his finger. The Greek word translated **"thorn"** means **"a sharp stake used for torturing or impaling."**

Rather than a paper cut, this was more like a knife, a tent

peg, an icepick. A messenger of Satan stabbed Paul - twisted in the knife - causing excruciating pain.

JB Phillips translates the word "*thorn*," "a stabbing pain." Another rendering uses the term "dagger."

Commentator, Warren Wiersbe, explains that the word "*buffet*" means "to beat, to strike with a fist" - the tense of the verb implies a constant or reoccurring action. Whatever Paul's "*thorn*" happened to be it was a *perpetual problem* - a pain that wouldn't go away.

As to the identity of Paul's "*thorn in the flesh*" - over the years all kinds of theories have been advanced...

One of the earliest suggestions was severe and prostrating **headaches**. Early church fathers, Tertullian and Jerome, believed Paul was the victim of reoccurring migraines... Martin Luther believed Paul's "*thorn in the flesh*" was a reference to **the constant opposition and persecution** he encountered... John Calvin said it referred to a **stinging conscience and a chronic self-doubt** that caused bouts of depression...

To this day a common view among Roman Catholics is that his "*thorn*" was a battle with **sexual temptation**.

Others have interpreted Paul's "*thorn*" as his **impulsive, trigger-happy personality**. On occasion Paul gave way to outbursts, and revealed a short fuse.

He split from Barnabas over a dispute. He had harsh words for the false teachers who wanted the Galatians to be circumcised. He said they ought to be *castrated*.

It could be a fiery temper was Paul's "*thorn*."

Other commentators think Paul's "*thorn in the flesh*" was a physical disease - maybe **epileptic seizures**.

Others identify his "*thorn*" as a **strain of malaria** common along the Mediterranean coast where he traveled. One sufferer of this disease described its accompanying headaches, as like "*a red-hot bar thrust though the forehead.*" Or possibly "*a thorn in the flesh.*"

Still other less serious theories have been advanced. Some folks have said facetiously that his "*thorn*" was his **mother-in-law**, or even his **wife**. A bad marriage and home life constituted Paul's "*thorn in the flesh.*"

To me, the most plausible theory was **an infectious eye-disease** that flared up on him from time to time - especially when he moved to more tropical climates.

It could be when the Lord revealed Himself to Paul in a blinding light on the road to Damascus its brightness weakened his eyes. Later, he picked up some kind of infection which caused his eyes to literally scab over.

In Galatians 4:15 Paul speaks of the church's compassion toward him. *They would've plucked out their own eyes and given them to Paul if possible.*

In Galatians 6:11 he talks about the large letters in which he wrote his letter - possibly another indication he was having a problem with his vision at the time.

A person suffering from trachoma develops a puss over the eye that causes their eyelashes to become brittle. At times they even dig into the eye. If you've ever had a scratch on

your cornea you can imagine the pain. It feels like a knife or *“thorn”* thrust into your eye.

We don't know what Paul's *thorn in the flesh* actually was, but we do know what he did about it - *he prayed*.

He tells us, verse 8, *“Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me.”*

Yet, despite his prayers, Paul's *thorn* didn't go away. Even after he prayed about it three times it remained.

I believe there's a profound reason why Paul never spells out the exact identity of his infamous thorn.

God leaves the blank empty so we can fill it in with our own particular malady. All the possibilities stress the idea that any or all of them can qualify as a *“thorn.”*

By not answering the question, *“what was Paul's thorn?”* perhaps God is coaxing us into asking an even more important question, *“what is my thorn?”*

Is your *thorn* an illness... migraines, or allergies, or bad eyesight, or high blood pressure, or diabetes, or chronic bad pain, or even a reoccurring cancer?

Maybe it's a chemical imbalance, or a physical addiction, or a clinical depression... Maybe your *thorn* is a personality trait - you're too timid, or too impulsive, or too abrasive... Perhaps it's a temptation you battle.

Maybe your thorn is a lack of confidence, or too much confidence - your thorn is an overinflated ego.

Earlier I said it facetiously, but maybe your *thorn in the flesh* is a difficult relationship - with a mother-in-law, or a spouse, or a child, or a boss, or a neighbor.

Have you've prayed and prayed - perhaps far more than three times - for God to remove your "*thorn in the flesh,*" and he hasn't? Well, **there's another option.**

Once a young lady approached me after a Bible Study and asked me why God wasn't answering her prayers. She had recently experienced some setbacks in her life, and all her friends were telling her, "If God really loved you, He wouldn't be letting this happen."

Later that same week she called and told me that out of desperation she'd picked up my booklet, "*Welcome to the Family of God.*" It fell open to page 11. And here's what she read, "When God says 'yes' to one of my prayers I get excited! I tell my friends. I stop people on the street and stand up in church to praise God for what He's done for me. It's a reason to rejoice.

But I should be just as thrilled when God says, 'no'. God is wiser than I am. My kids desire things that look good to them. but would prove harmful, and as a responsible parent I have to say *no*. When God says *no* to me He is only looking out for my best interests."

This lady got excited. She realize a "*no*" from God doesn't mean He doesn't love us. In fact, real love says, "*no,*" as often as "*yes.*" Paul prayed three times for God to remove his *thorn* and each time God said "*no.*" And His "*no*" was as laced with love as His "*yes.*"

There was a good reason God said “no” to Paul.

Rather than remove it, God allowed the *thorn*. Lest he should “*be exalted above measure...*” God wanted to keep Paul grounded. He didn’t want him getting the big-head and thinking more of himself than he should.

The thorn was a permanent reminder of how much Paul needed God - how dependent he was on Him.

Never forget, every Christian battles with pride. After we receive God’s grace, and He begins to work in our lives, good things happen. Our life receives blessing.

And we conclude, *I’m finally getting what I deserve.*

*My kids are coming around... I’m making more money... my wife has finally started to respect me... **look at me!*** We start to take credit for the good stuff.

Hey, *God’s blessing can produce our bloating.*

We forget, it was our weakness that drove us to God’s strength. Rather than earn God’s favor, we trusted and rested in Christ. We’re now *Jesus-strong!*

And to keep us in that posture of dependence, God will position a *thorn* in our life. He will allow a messenger of Satan to buffet you, or beat on you.

It’s painful, but it’s worth it. God strategically plants an aggravation on you that He knows will keep you *coming to Him and leaning on Him. It becomes a gift!*

I know a pastor who struggled for years with chronic-fatigue syndrome. There were days when his whole body would shut down. He couldn’t get out of bed.

Yet I was amazed at the effectiveness of his ministry.

*I wondered if he didn't have the disease how much more could he do?* But that's not how he thought. He said it was due to his weakness, that God did more in his life than he could've done without the illness.

**His weakness became God's opportunity.** No other fingerprints were on the work. God got all the glory.

In his paraphrase of this passage, Eugene Peterson has an interesting way of rendering verses 8-9. Paul says of his *thorn*, "At first I didn't think of it as a gift, and begged God to remove it. Three times I did that, and then he told me, 'My grace is enough; it's all you need. My strength comes into its own in your weakness.'"

I love those words, "**At first I didn't think of it as a gift.**" And who does, *at first*? A thorn is painful. It's an unwanted hassle. "**God, take your tweezers and pluck it out.**" But over time it's purpose becomes apparent.

It's seen as a gift. Imagine, *a thorn gift*.

This is how God responds to Paul's plea to remove his "*thorn*." Verse 9, "**And He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.'**" That's when Paul embraces the thorn. He says, "**Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.**"

His thorn was still a thorn. I doubt Paul ever enjoyed the pain it caused. But he accepted it as **a gift**. When he saw how it kept him on his knees, and the power of Christ rested on him - he boasted even in his "*thorn!*"

In fact, it was when Paul accepted his thorn as a *gift*, that God released His *grace*! Here's a counter-intuitive thought - it goes against the grain - "*when you thank God for the thorn, His grace begins to work wonders!*"

A wise old saint once wrote a suffering friend, "Ah, if you knew what power there is in an accepted sorrow!"

Satan sent a **messenger** to buffet Paul, but God sent a **message** to empower Paul. God told him, "*My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.*" God took Paul to heaven, but it was a "*thorn in the flesh*" that brought heaven to Paul.

The tense in the first phrase of verse 9 is significant. It should read, "And God has once-and-for-all said to me..." Just as the *thorn* was his perpetually struggle, grace would serve as his perpetual source of strength.

To our knowledge God never removed Paul's *thorn*, instead He used it as the backdrop on which He displayed His strength. Up against Paul's weakness, God's power became stronger and more effectual.

No matter what you identify as your *thorn* - God's grace, His power, is more than enough to transform your weakness into a mighty show of His strength.

All too often we want the *elimination* of our weakness, yet God opts for *transformation*. We hope *He removes the obstacle, He heals the disease, He changes my personality, He wipes out my enemies - He plucks out the thorn* - but God answers, "no."

Instead, God works to transform our weakness into a strength. PT Forsyth once wrote, "It is a greater thing to pray for pain's conversion than for its removal."

*"But Pastor Sandy you don't understand the pain I'm constantly dealing with." And I don't... but I do know the one thing more lethal than that **thorn** is your pride.*

Remember pride is the sin by which Lucifer fell. Pride made a devil. Nothing is as sinister as pride.

And God knows, if the uneasiness, the squirming, even the pain, caused by a *"**thorn in your flesh,**"* is going to keep your spirit in line with God, then so be it.

He knows the balance required between *blessings and buffetings*. The Lord knows the right mix of *crowns and crosses, of trophies and thorns* needed to insure that we *grow up* without becoming *puffed up*. If a *thorn* keeps us at *God's throne*; then mission accomplished.

Roy Campanella was an All Star catcher for the Brooklyn Dodgers before he lost the use of his arms and legs in an automobile accident. But over time Roy saw his injuries as more of a *blessing* than a *blight*...

For months he did his physical therapy at a hospital on the East River in New York. Everyday he rolled his wheelchair past a plague on the wall. One day he read the plague, *then read it again*. Here's what it said...

*"I asked God for strength, that I might achieve. I was made weak, that I might learn humbly to obey... I asked for health, that I might do great things. I was given infirmity, that I might*

do better things... I asked for riches, that I might be happy. I was given poverty, that I might be wise... I asked for power, that I might have the praise of men. I was given weakness, that I might feel the need for God... I asked for all things, that I might enjoy life. I was given life, that I might enjoy all things...

I got nothing I asked for - but everything I hoped for. I am, among men, most richly blessed." This was Paul.

Remember Paul wrote in Philippians 4:13, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." Folks quote that verse in regards to running touchdowns or sacking the QB. But that's not what Paul had in mind.

He was speaking of doing life - thriving in any situation. In Christ he could *prosper or be poor - be full or be hungry*. In all things, God's grace was sufficient.

Rather than get mad that God had failed to remove his *thorn*, Paul learned to view that *thorn* as God's gift.

He rejoiced in the weakness it caused. It was God's opportunity to demonstrate His supernatural strength.

Paul finishes his thoughts on the *thorn* in verse 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."

Paul was stronger leaning on God in his weakest moment than he'd be at the pinnacle of his own power.

This is why he took pleasure in circumstances *where he was overwhelm - no longer in control*. He learned a weak Paul empowered by God's grace was more effective than a

*strong Paul at peak performance.*

Paul was confident that God's grace was sufficient...

One day, Charles Spurgeon was walking along London's Thames River when this verse came to mind.

He imagined himself as a fish swimming in the huge river, sipping as little water as possible for fear of drinking it all dry. He heard Father Thames tell him, "[Drink away little fish, my stream is sufficient for you.](#)"

Later he thought of himself as a tiny Egyptian mouse trapped in Joseph's vast storehouse of grain. He nibbled at the grain, because he was worried of depleting the supply. But Father Joseph said, "[Eat up little mouse, for my granaries are sufficient for you.](#)"

Finally, he was a mountain climber scaling a summit while holding his breath. He was afraid he would breathe in the final ounces of oxygen. That's when the Creator spoke, "[Breathe deeply and fill your lungs with all the air you need, my sky is sufficient for you.](#)"

As vast as the ocean - as full as all the silos in all the farms in all the world - as thick as the air above us... God's grace is totally sufficient for anything we need.

In the words of the famous hymn, "[For out of His infinite riches in Jesus, God giveth and giveth and giveth again.](#)" **Grace means favor.** And God *pours out the fruits of His favor* - joy, peace, love, endurance - whatever is needed on those who trust in His Son!

*“But Sandy you don’t know what I’m facing. I’m in too deep. It’s too strong. The wall is too high.”* Listen, I don’t care about the situation, *God’s grace is sufficient.*

Greg Lucas has a special-needs son named “Jake.”

After Jake’s annual dentist appointment, he was afraid to take the elevator, so the kind nurse asked Greg, *“Do you want us to help you take the stairs?”*

Jake was so excited he didn’t have to ride the elevator, he kissed the nurse. *I’m talking a big, wet, sloppy kiss.* Every three steps Jake kissed the nurse.

Since there were 300 steps that meant 100 kisses.

And after each clumsy kiss Greg apologized for his son. As usual Greg was embarrassed by his behavior.

Finally, when they all reached the bottom of the stairs, Greg mustered a final apology. That’s when the kind nurse scolded Greg... *“Will you stop apologizing! I needed every last one of those kisses today!”*

As usual Greg’s pride had blinded him to what the nurse saw clearly. Though his son is weak, and clumsy, and uncouth God uses him, and people like him, in amazing ways every day. When will we learn our weakness is not a limitation to God. It’s an opportunity.

To a degree Paul’s life was like Jake’s. In some ways Paul embarrassed the proud Corinthians. Yet he was a lesson to the world of the strength found in weakness.

This is God’s way - *don’t despise the thorn.* You don’t have to enjoy it, but it’s only when you embrace it, that God uses it

in the way that He had intended all along.

I don't know who's going to win tonight's game. But don't think for a second our God will only be in the winner's locker room. He'll also be *Lord of the losers*.

Actually, God does His greatest work in defeats not victories, in losses not wins, in weakness not strength.

When we are weakest, God makes us strongest.