

2 Corinthians 12

Title ideas:

Is Grace Enough?

His Grace is Enough!

A Thorn in the Flesh!

Resting in His Power!

2 Corinthians 12:1-10 – Is Grace Enough?

Scriptures:

Acts 16:9 - And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us."

Acts 22:17-18 - Now it happened, when I returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, that I was in a trance 18 and saw Him saying to me, 'Make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, for they will not receive your testimony concerning Me.'

Ephesians 3:1-7 - For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles—2 if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, 3 how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, 4 by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), 5 which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: 6 that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel, 7 of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power.

Acts 19:11-12 - Now God worked unusual miracles by the hands of Paul, 12 so that even handkerchiefs or aprons were brought from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out of them.

¹It is doubtless not profitable for me to boast. I

4851 – be advantageous, it is good, it is better, it is beneficial

will come to visions and revelations of the Lord:

3701 – a supernatural vision

602 – 'apokalypseis' – what is revealed, a disclosure – 'Communication of knowledge (previously hidden) to man by a divine or supernatural agency; especially communications that proceed from God or Christ.'

Notes:

Paul's detractors had boasted in their ethnic and religious pedigrees, and Paul responded by reciting his own which surpassed those of the greatest 'super-apostle'. These also boasted in their ecstatic spiritual experiences. During that time, it was not uncommon for God to speak to man in visions and dreams (which He still does) and these guys are claiming that makes them better than Paul. But again, Paul's experiences far outshine theirs.

And even though all that is true, Paul disliked talking about himself and his experiences in a way that made him appear to be special or important.

Paul saw no benefit to the Corinthians in His boasting. His desire was to keep his detractors from destroying what God had wrought through Paul in Corinth.

God worked miracles (unusual miracles) through Paul which he chooses not to mention here ([Acts 19:11-12](#)).

"While God often uses our sharing of the experiences we have had with Him to inspire others, we must not become spiritual exhibitionists." (Chafin, 1985) page 282

What might be very spiritual and special to us might be very common and ordinary to someone else. Share only what is necessary for the work God has given you.

Scriptures:

Acts 8:39 - Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing.

1 Thessalonians 4:17 - Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.

²I 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

726 – ‘harpazo’ – snatch, seize, a rapture to God and glory – ‘To be or become seized or grasped hastily or eagerly; often in order to be taken away.’

heaven.

Notes:

Paul refers to himself in the third person for some unknown reason but then switches back to first person in verses 4 to 7. This may be a signal with his discomfort talking about himself in this way.

In Paul’s ‘rapture’ experience he couldn’t tell if he bodily was taken to heaven like Enoch or Elijah, or if it was the out-of-body transport of his human spirit like John on Patmos.

“Biblical cosmology views the heavens as threefold. The first heaven is the atmosphere. The second heaven is the place of the stars. And the third heaven is the abode of God.” (Hughes, 2006) page 210

This is just one of Paul’s radical ecstatic spiritual experiences. He could have cited several others, like when He met Jesus on the Road to Damascus.

Scriptures:

³ And I know such a man—whether in the body or

Notes:

“If you were suddenly to be called away from the body, would you be going home?” (Ironsides, 1938) page 453

out of the body I do not know, God knows—

Scriptures:

Luke 23:42-43 - Then he said to Jesus, “Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.”
43 And Jesus said to him, “Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.”

⁴ how he was caught up into Paradise and heard

726 – see verse 2

3857 –
Only three occurrences:
Luke 23:43
Revelation 2:7

Notes:

Things were shared with Paul that he was forbidden to repeat. What trust God in Paul! How I want to be worthy of that kind of trust!

Revelation 2:7 - He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.

inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a

731 –
unspeakably holy

4487 -

1832 – to be
permissible

Why was Paul shown these things that then told not to share them?
“...this thing happened for Paul’s sake, for a man awaiting him troubles hard enough to break a thousand hearts needed to be strengthened in a special way to keep him from giving way and to help him to persevere undaunted” John Calvin (Hughes, 2006) page 211

“This epic experience sustained an epic heart.” (Hughes, 2006) page 211

‘Paradise’ = royal garden

man to utter.

2980 – to speak

Scriptures:

⁵ Of such a one **I** will boast; yet of **myself I** will

Notes:

Paul didn't want his authority in the church to be based upon ecstatic spiritual experiences but upon the actions and words of his life.

not boast, except in **my** infirmities.

769 – incapacity,
a state of
weakness or
limitation

Scriptures:

⁶ For though **I** might desire to boast, **I** will not be a

Notes:

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**.

Scriptures:

Galatians 4:13-15 - You know that because of physical infirmity I preached the gospel to you at the first. 14 And my trial which was in my flesh you did not despise or reject, but you received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus. 15 What then was the blessing you enjoyed? For I bear you witness that, if possible, you would have plucked out your own eyes and given them to me.

Romans 8:28 - And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.

7 And lest **I** should be exalted above measure by

5229 – be overly proud - 'to be over-exalted'

the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the

5236 – extraordinary overabundance

4647 – Gal. 4:13-15

flesh was given to **me**, a messenger of Satan to

4561 -

1325 -

32 – 'angelos' – (angel)

buffet **me**, lest **I** be exalted above measure.

2852 – strike with fist, beat, cause harm, torment

Scriptures:

8 Concerning this thing **I** pleaded with the Lord

3870 -

three times that it might depart from **me**.

868 - leave

Notes:

'thorn' – not specified what the thorn is. Could have been an ailment in his eyes. Whatever it was, it was debilitating and humiliating. Either the Corinthians knew what the thorn was or Paul didn't feel it was important to define it.

The 'thorn' was given to Paul to keep him from getting puffed up and becoming unusable. As great a spiritual man as Paul was, he needed this thorn to keep him grounded in humility.

Just as the visions and revelations came from God, so did the thorn. God gave Satan permission, or may have even directed him to 'buffet' Paul for his own good.

Paul's detractors would have pointed to his thorn as evidence that God wasn't with Paul. Paul says the opposite is actually true. Not only does it prove that God is with him, but that he is with Paul more than with his detractors.

His detractors were preaching a health and prosperity doctrine that viewed affliction and weakness and as a sign of God's displeasure.

Paul didn't accept it as a good thing – 'a messenger of Satan'. He is saying that even though it was 'buffeting' Paul, God would bring good from it (Rom. 8:28). God could use it to demonstrate His power.

Whatever the thorn was, it was painful.

Notes:

Paul didn't like having this thorn. He wanted God to take it away.

There is a parallel here to Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus prayed three times that the cup of the indignation of God over sin would depart from him. And just as God said no to Jesus, Jesus says no to Paul.

"Whenever Christ says no to our desperate passionate pleadings, the no is freighted with His perfect, compassionate goodness and love." (Hughes, 2006) page 213

God's answers to our prayers are never negative, even when the answer is no.

Scriptures:

9 And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for

5485 – 'charis' – kindness, gift, good will, favor – 'The resulting activity that is a necessary consequence of genuine, beneficent goodwill; especially used of the outworking of God's goodwill.'

714 – 'to be sufficient; be adequate, either in quality or quantity.'

Notes:

This is the key verse of the letter.

God's no is always based upon His perfect love, compassion, goodness, and holiness.

Paul acknowledged and accepted that his thorn in the flesh was essential to the power of Christ resting upon him.

you, for My strength is made perfect in

1411 – supernatural power

5048 - perfected

Paul was repulsed about the idea of boasting in himself and his accomplishments, he was hesitant to boast in the things he had endured for Christ, but he 'gladly' boasted in his weakness. It was the backdrop of Paul's weaknesses that made his accomplishments and suffering reveal the power of God resting upon him.

weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather

It is upon my weaknesses that the power of Christ rests upon. It is the only place that His power can rest. God's power might show up in my areas of strength, but rests (resides, dwells) in my weaknesses. Paul leaned into his areas of weakness because that was where God's power became most evident.

boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ

1411 – supernatural power

Our culture, just like Paul's, believes God's power resides with the powerful and famous of the world, with the ones who claim they are someone.

may rest upon me.

1981 – take up residence, dwell in
1909 -

Scriptures:

2 Corinthians 4:7-12 - But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us. 8 We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; 9 persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed—10 always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. 11 For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. 12 So then death is working in us, but life in you.

¹⁰ Therefore **I** take pleasure in infirmities, in

2106 – be pleased with

reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in

distresses, for Christ's sake. For when **I** am weak,

770 -

then **I** am strong.

1415 – able, capable

Application:

1. Identify the source
2. Ask God to take it away
3. Rejoice in God's grace

Notes:

Power in weakness is the thread that is woven through this entire epistle and finds its greatest expression in this chapter. And all this should draw our eyes to the cross of Christ.

“In God's plan of redemption, there had to be weakness (crucifixion) before there was power (resurrection).” (Hughes, 2006) page 214

It is not that Paul enjoyed suffering or difficult circumstances but he rejoiced in every opportunity to display the power of God through his sufferings and difficulties.

“There is no value in the endurance of hardships and indignities in themselves. There is no virtue in suffering. Everything turns on the phrase ‘for the sake of Christ’” (Hughes, 2006) page 215

The spiritual math is not my weakness + His strength = my power. It is my weakness + His strength = His power.