

Grace Is Sufficient

2 Corinthians 12:9

FOCAL Read Responsively 2 Corinthians 12:9 He said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. **Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.**

As I sat in the hospital waiting on one of our members I overheard the television, and had a strange sensation of *deja vu*. You know what *deja vu* is, don't you? It's the strange sensation you get when you hear or do something and feel like you've been there before. The newscaster was talking about a *terrible pandemic* called the *swine flu*. This thing is supposed to ring about the end of civilization as we know it. Not too long ago the mainstream media tried to scare us to death over the *avian flu*. That thing was supposed to be a pandemic - a nation killer - as well. The only people badly effected by the avian flu - also called SARS - were those who live in China. The reason they were hurt was because many in that country actually keep their chickens in their houses. I don't keep chickens in my house, and the only pig in my house is in the freezer waiting to be eaten. So what about the *swine flu*?

At present around 2000 people in Mexico are down with the swine flu, and around 150 have died throughout that nation. None have died in the United States from swine flu, and the *fifty cases* that have been reported nationwide have been extremely mild. Britain has only seen 2 - yes, TWO cases - of swine flu. This is not a pandemic. As a matter of fact the *plain old flu* - not the swine flu but the everyday kind - hits from 300,000 to 500,000 Americans every year, and 30,000 to 40,000 people die from the flu every year. Yet we have only



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seen 50 cases of swine flu - and this is a *pandemic*? For goodness sake, look up! Look to Jesus, and quit looking to a liberal and confused media. **Pastor Adrian Rogers** said:

“Many people ask, 'what is the answer to my dilemma? The answer to your dilemma is not *what* but *Who*. The answer to your problem – any problem – is Jesus”

Are there not bad things in the world? Absolutely! Bad things happen to everyone, but God is in control. Bad things were happening to the Apostle Paul. Who did Paul go to? Jesus Christ. He said **“I sought the Lord three times”**. How did the Lord reply? He said **"My Grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness"**. What was Jesus telling Paul? He was telling him that - no - He wasn't going to remove the trial. The trial was there for a purpose. The Lord Jesus put the trial in Paul's life. Jesus was also telling Paul that the purpose of the trial was to *remove strength from Paul* so that Jesus could work in Paul's life. God works in the willing vessel. God works through the surrendered life. The greatest blessing that God can do to any of us is to live with us and through us.

There's something else very striking in this text, and it is the words **"He said unto me"**. When we translate the original text of Sacred Scripture into our language we often lose a little something in the translation. The actual tense of the verb **"He said"** connects the past with the present. We might translate it as **"He spoke once and for all to me"**, or even **"from that time He has been**

saying to me". The Lord Jesus told Paul **"My Grace is sufficient"**, and that message so marked his soul that trials and tribulations no longer broke his spirit. The Apostle said in another place:

Philippians 4:11-13 Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. {12} I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. {13} I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.

"I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, to be content". There are times when we have surplus. Our bellies are filled, and our lives are at peace. There are other times when the dark specter of suffering strikes, and our lives are filled with pain. Yet whether in pain or peace, surplus or suffering the Apostle Paul **learned to be content**. Why? Because he knew that trials and tribulation are not random events in the lives of God's people. They come our way because our Creator allows them to come. They come to create in us a place where God can do a mighty work!

1. Christ Controls Both Trials And Grace

FOCAL 2 Corinthians 12:9 He said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. ..

Christ didn't tell Paul "There's nothing I can do about the trial." What He told Paul was "I am using the trial to grow YOU."

The Apostle Paul was going through a very trying time. We don't know exactly what the problem was – nor does it matter exactly what it was – but we do know that it was terrifying to Paul. Paul called his trial:

2 Corinthians 12:7 ... a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me

A thorn in the flesh. If you've ever gotten a thorn deep down in your flesh you know how irritating – and painful – it can be. When you get a thorn in a finger it seems as if everything you touch hits the afflicted finger first. Paul also called this trial "**a messenger of Satan to buffet or beat on me**". It wasn't the devil himself, but it was one of the devil's devils. It was a grievous suffering. How did Paul handle it? We read:

2 Corinthians 12:8 For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me.

Paul went to Jesus **three times** in prayer, asking that the suffering be taken away. When we suffer we should do as Paul did, and take the suffering to Jesus. The Bible tells us that we **have a faithful High Priest** Who knows our pain.

Hebrews 2:18 Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being

tempted.^{NIV}

Jesus Christ suffered terribly. He suffered before He went to the Cross of Calvary.

Just as Paul **sought the Lord three times** for relief in his suffering, Jesus Christ **prayed three times in Gethsemane "take away this cup from Me: nevertheless not what I will, but what Thou wilt"** (Mark 14:34-36; Matthew 26:44).

Jesus was troubled, knowing that our sins would be poured out on Him, and sought the Father three times that the Cup of Suffering would pass. Yet, in the end, He had to drink deeply of this cup. It was the only way we could be saved.

As Paul suffered he went to Jesus Christ, the Source of Grace.

John 1:17 For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.

It is "**through the Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved**" (Acts 15:11). Works cannot save a person, for works come from the source of ourselves. Our works are filthy, filled with sin. Our actions apart from the Grace of God are all filthy rags. What does God say of the natural state of man?

Isaiah 64:6 But we are all as an unclean thing, and

all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.

We cannot be the source of our salvation. Our well is polluted with sin. Our righteousnesses are – in the eyes of a Holy and Pure God – are all blemished.

Pride tells us “yes, you are good enough”, but God tells us “no, you are not! Without Grace you are lost and undone. Trials open our eyes to the reality that we need the Lord. Pastor **Ian Maclaren** rightly said:

“The world has its own idea of blessedness. Blessed is the man who is always right. Blessed is the man who is satisfied with himself. Blessed is the man who is strong. Blessed is the man who rules. Blessed is the man who is rich, Blessed is the man who is popular. Blessed is the man who enjoys life. These are the beatitudes of sight and of this present world. It comes with a shock and opens a new realm of thought that not one of these men entered Jesus' mind when He treated of blessedness.”

Trials break us, get us to the bottom of life's barrel so that we have to look up and see Jesus. Dear friends, without Grace – God's riches at Christ's expense – you are forever lost. We must have Grace. We go to Jesus for Grace. Paul went to Jesus Christ to be saved.

Ephesians 2:8-9 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:

{9} Not of works, lest any man should boast.

Before you were saved you thought that you were sufficient. Like Saul the unconverted you ran up and down the Damascus Road trying to “help God out”. **You thought you were doing good, but your righteousnesses** were not blessed of God. You were – as Jesus told Saul - “**persecuting Jesus**”. You were not doing good, but were doing bad. God had to break you to save you. He had to empty your cup so that you could

Psalms 116:13 I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the LORD.

A man full of himself cannot be saved. He will not drink of the cup of salvation if he is not thirsty. But a thirsty person – a person who is aware of his thirst and need – that person will drink. Dear friends, God uses trials to open our eyes to Grace.

God uses suffering to awaken us to our need of salvation. When we are well and filled with life's riches we have a tendency to think, “I don't need God – God needs me!” Like Satan we become lifted up with pride, and we become Me centered. When a trial greater than we are comes on our lives we run to the Lord Jesus and away from our own strength. We cry out, like **Peter going under the waves (Matthew 14:30), “Lord, save me”**. Listen Beloved. **Joseph** prior to the **pit** stands bragging before his brothers of his 'coat of many colors'. He runs to his brothers to tell them of **his dream where he will rule over them (Genesis 37:5)**. **Joseph after the pit**

and after the prison brags only on his God. When his brothers come before him Joseph forgives them, saying

Genesis 50:20-21 But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive. {21} Now therefore fear ye not: I will nourish you, and your little ones. And he comforted them, and spoke kindly unto them.

Grace saves, and Grace secures, but we are not willing to surrender to Grace until our pride is broken. We want to fix it ourselves until we can't fix it. Dear friends, a mother's love is most keenly felt when – as children – we hurt ourselves and ran to her waiting arms.

Trials are not monsters that wander through the forest of life, waiting to pounce on unsuspecting travelers. Trials drive us into the arms of Love.

No, dear friends. Paul ran to Jesus in the midst of his trials for he knew that the Lord Who loved him and gave Himself for him:

Galatians 2:20 I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.

If Jesus loved you and gave Himself for you, will He now abandon you in the trial? Absolutely not! What did

Jesus say to Paul?

FOCAL 2 Corinthians 12:9 He said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee:

My Grace. The Grace of Jesus Christ is sufficient to save you. The Grace of Jesus Christ is sufficient to carry you through life and through trials. We who believe serve a Living Savior, and His Grace is for the Living not just for the dead.

2. Grace Is For Living

FOCAL 2 Corinthians 12:9 He said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. ..

We not only have the Grace that saves us, but we who are Christians *live by Grace* When Paul sought that the Lord remove his “**thorn in the flesh**” the Lord responded, “**My Grace is sufficient for thee. My strength is made perfect in weakness**”.

Dear friends, you *enter* the Christian way of life by faith in Jesus Christ. You also *live* the Christian way of life by faith in Jesus Christ.

The Christian, saved by faith, trusts in and leans on Jesus moment by moment and day by day. Do we fear? Yes, we have fears. But we fear the Lord more than we fear anything else. We cling to Him.

Proverbs 14:26-27 In the fear of the LORD is strong confidence: and his children shall have a place of refuge. {27} The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death.

When we fear, we fear the Lord – loving Him. We trust in Him and *do not fear our trials*. King David said:

Psalms 56:3 What time I am afraid, I will trust in Thee.

Think of those words. "**What time I am afraid**". David had fears. He was afraid. Fearful things happen to everyone. Yet the fearful things that come to believers are under the loving eyes of God. David made a choice to – when confronted with fear – **trust in the Lord**. The Bible tells us that:

Hebrews 10:38-39 Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. {39} But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.

The just – those who are saved by the faith of Christ – do not draw back so as to become consumed by the world. When tried we cling to Jesus. When tried we hang on to the Lord Who loves us and Who has saved us.

We recognize that *all trials have a purpose* in the Christian life. Jesus said **“My strength is made perfect**

in weakness”. God will not be able to fill your cup until He empties out all that is you. But once you who are believers trust in the Lord - **casting all your cares and worries on Him because He cares for you (1 Peter 5:7)** – then He can use you in a mighty way. Trials prepare us so that God can use us.

When confronted by trials we can **allow fear to overwhelm us – or we can trust the Lord**. We can **listen to the threats of those enemies around us – or we can trust the Lord**. We can **seek our own solutions – or we can turn to God in prayer**. We can **follow our own suggestions – or turn to the Great Shepherd and do as He says**.

If you're a Christian, dear friend, you are alive and not dead. Though you may have fear, understand that you have a God Who loves you. You were saved **“that [God] might rescue us from all our evil ways and make for Himself a people of His own, clean and pure, with our hearts set upon living a life that is good” (Titus 2:14, Phillips Translation)**. When fearful things happen draw near to the Lord. **Vance Havner** illustrated trials by saying:

“Sometimes your medicine bottle has on it, “Shake well before using.” That is what God has to do with His people. He has to shake them well before they are ever usable.”

The Scripture tells us that God uses trials to make us usable vessels. Trust the Lord when you do not

understand the circumstance. Christianity is a living and growing relationship. This relationship begins on the day that the believer **"takes the cup of salvation, and calls upon the Name of the Lord" (Psalm 116:13)**. When the Christian - believing on the Lord Jesus Christ - enters into the Family of God, his perspective begins to change. We start to look at things from a different way. God enters into the framework of our lives, and we become **people with divine purpose**. Let all the world wander aimlessly through this life pleasing only itself. The Christian is called to follow Jesus, to walk with God, to grow in our relationship with Him. The Christian speaks to God, and God speaks to the Christian. Jesus said **"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me" (John 10:27)**. Because we are His sheep we hear Him. Because we are His sheep He knows us. Because we are His sheep we follow Him. Because we follow Him, Jesus said, **"I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand" (John 10:8)**.

We are saved by faith in Christ, and because we are saved by faith in Christ we **follow Him**. Faith saves, but work follows faith. We do not follow Christ in order to be saved. We follow Christ *because* we are saved. Christianity is all about a relationship with God – and we grow in our relationship as we trust God in the midst of trying and difficult situations.

ILLUSTRATE A pearl is no more than a grain of sand – an irritant – covered with a coating.

During the reign of **Mary 1 (February 18, 1516-**

November 17, 1558) many Christians were killed for their faith. **"Bloody Mary"** as she was called had around 300 Christians burned at the stake. One Christian who was supposed to be executed was a believer by the name of **John Gilpin**. Gilpin had been sentenced to death by Bloody Mary, and was on his way to his execution. When he and his guards got half way through their journey Gilpin fell off his horse, breaking his leg. The guards were obligated to deliver him to the stake alive so he could be burned. They feared that his injury was so severe that to move him might cause him to die before he reached his place of execution. If that happened they would be liable, and they didn't want to get on the bad side of "Bloody Mary". So they waited a few days before going on to complete their journey.

Many of you might be thinking, "Here's a man – a Christian – scheduled to be burned alive. Why would his Loving Creator allow him to fall off his horse and break a leg *in addition to* all else that he was suffering. After all, doesn't the Scripture say:

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

How could good come of this? But it was good. While John Gilpin lay in a rough bed regaining his strength "Bloody Mary" lost her throne to **"Elizabeth 1"**. When Elizabeth came to the throne she revoked Mary's death sentences. When John Gilpin went into Smithfield Market where he would have been martyred the coronation bells are ringing. Elizabeth 1 had come to the

throne and “Bloody Mary” is banished forever. “**All things work together for good to them that love God**”. Trials do not destroy Christians, but they temper the Christian and make him stronger in his faith. The Justified must live by their faith. **Robert Browning Hamilton** wrote:

**I walked a mile with Pleasure,
She chattered all the way;
But left me none the wiser,
For all she had to say.
I walked a mile with Sorrow
And ne'er a word said she;
But, oh, the things I learned from her
When Sorrow walked with me!**¹

The Christian learns more from pain and suffering than he does from the bright moments of life. Pain and suffering teach us to lean on Jesus. Look at arrogant Peter.

Saved by faith in Christ, he was so puffed up that he believed himself better than all others. What did Peter tell Jesus?

Matthew 26:33 Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended.

When Jesus gently told Peter “**before the cock crows, you will deny Me three times**” (Matthew 26:33) Peter would hear none of it.

Matthew 26:35 Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee.

Peter denied Jesus in Gethsemane when he slept instead of praying with the Lord. Peter denied Jesus three times as he stood outside the courtyard, as the Master stood within being unjustly tried. Peter did not stand with Jesus as He was nailed to that tree. Peter's failure under trial took all of the arrogance out of him, and made him a fit vessel to serve the Living God.

God's strength is only made perfect in weakness. When we understand this – truly understand it – then trials cease to be curses and begin to be blessings. They are blessings because **His Grace is sufficient for us.**

3. When We Rest In Christ, Christ's Power Rests In Us

FOCAL 2 Corinthians 12:9 He said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. **Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.**

In order to understand the last part of this verse we need to look to the original languages of our Bible. Often great treasures are hidden in the original text of Sacred Scripture. For instance, in the Gospel of John we read of Jesus Christ, **the Word made flesh**. We are told that

¹ From *Along The Road*

John 1:14 ... the Word was made flesh, and dwelt² among us

The word translated “dwelt” in our King James text literally means “to tabernacle, to camp with”.

What this emphasizes is that Jesus came to this earth – Eternal God from the Heavens – and *camped out* among us in human flesh. **He tabernacled among us.** Now look at the last part of our focal text:

FOCAL 2 Corinthians 12:9 ... Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest³ upon me.

The words we translate as “may rest upon me” are from the same word we see in John 1:14. The Apostle says “**I will boast in my infirmities – in my trials and tribulations – because they make it possible that the POWER OF CHRIST tabernacle or camp out in my life.**” Trials make us more like Jesus. Trials make us surrender to the Lord's power and to avoid our own power.

Just as God's Shekinah Glory shined in the Tabernacle of Israel. God shines His power through our lives when we are surrendered to Him. **The Apostle Paul did not rely on his own power, but on the promised Power of God.**

² Σκηνοῶ Pronounced *skay-no'-o*, to tent or encamp, i.e. (figuratively) to occupy (as a mansion) or (specially), to reside (as God did in the Tabernacle of old, a symbol of protection and communion)

³ Ἐπισκηνοῶ Pronounced *ep-ee-skay-no'-o*, to fix a tent or habitation on, to take possession of and live in the houses of the citizens

He trusted God moment by moment and day by day. He did not allow the circumstances of his life to dictate how he lived his life. The Apostle said in the previous chapter:

2 Corinthians 11:24-30 Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. {25} Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; {26} In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; {27} In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. {28} Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches. {29} **Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not? {30} If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things which concern mine infirmities.**

Paul said “**I will glory in my infirminities. I will brag on them, and praise God for them**”. Why? Because

2 Corinthians 12:10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.

The Christian, weakened but looking up, is much more powerful than the Christian strong and looking around. The believer looking unto Jesus is invincible, whereas

the Christian looking elsewhere is quickly defeated. Trials teach us to rely on the the Lord Who loves us.

Pastor F.W. Boreham stopped at a quaint old cottage in England owned by Christian widow. She put him up in her own bedroom while she spent the night in another room. When the sun came up in the morning Pastor Boreham saw that into the glass of the windowpane had been cut the words: "This is the day." He asked the elderly lady about it at breakfast. She explained that she had had a lot of trouble in her time and was always afraid of what was going to happen tomorrow. One day she read the words of Scripture:

Psalms 118:24 This is the day which the LORD hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.

and it occurred to her that it meant any day was "this day". The widow said, "Why should I be afraid of the days if He makes them?" God makes the days. He made every day. He controls everything that comes our way. And everything that happens occurs to drive us into His loving arms. **This is the day that the Lord hath made.** Rejoice in it. If you are tried in this day praise God for it, for the trials weaken us so that **Christ's power can tabernacle in us.**

To those without trials the Bible is but a book with witty sayings throughout. To those with trials the Bible is the Word of God, filled cover to cover with promises given to His children.

Psalms 84:11-12 For the LORD God is a sun and shield: the LORD will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly. {12} O LORD of hosts, blessed is the man that trusteth in thee.

And again,

Isaiah 41:10 Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.

The God Who saved you is the God Who will lift you up. See Him in the trials.

To those without trials prayer is a few memorized words said over a meal before you eat it – if you happen to remember to pray before you eat. To those with trials prayer is a one on one conversation with Almighty God, a wondrous time of fellowship with the Maker.

Oh Beloved, do not cringe when trials and tribulation come your way, but look upward! Can you say with the saints of old:

Psalms 56:11 In God have I put my trust: I will not be afraid what man can do unto me.

Oh, that you would all know the Lord! I do not pray that your trial lessen, but I pray that your trial drive you into

the arms of Jesus.

ILLUSTRATE A farmer was walking in the field one day when a small bird flew to her and rested on her shoulder. The farmer, standing still, wondered why such a bird would be so trusting. He looked upward and saw a large hawk in the air. The hawk had pursued the little lark, and fear drove it to the safety of his shadow. Trials are like that hawk. Many of you have no concern for Jesus in this life, and walk blindly through this life ignoring His all sufficient Grace. You think you are sufficient in yourself to get to Heaven and to live your lives. But then the hawk of tribulation and trial comes. You fly and fly, struggling to make it in your own power. Finally in desperation you see Jesus, and in desperation you fly to Him for safety. Dear friends, here is Grace a plenty. **His Grace is sufficient for you.** His Grace is sufficient to save you. His Grace is sufficient to keep you. His Grace is sufficient to lead you beyond this life and into the next.

May God teach you to trust in Him, Jesus our Lord!

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Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

Pastor Adrian Rogers “Many people ask, 'what is the answer to my dilemma? The answer to your dilemma is not *what* but *Who*. The answer to your problem – any problem – is Jesus”

1. Christ Controls Both Trials And Grace

2 Corinthians 12:9; 2 Corinthians 12:7; 2 Corinthians 12:8; Hebrews 2:18; Mark 14:34-36; Matthew 26:44; John 1:17; Isaiah 64:6; Ephesians 2:8-9; Psalms 116:13; Matthew 14:30; Genesis 37:5; Genesis 50:20-21; Galatians 2:20 _____

2. Grace Is For Living

2 Corinthians 12:9; Proverbs 14:26-27; Psalms 56:3; Hebrews 10:38-39; Titus 2:14; Romans 8:28; Matthew 26:33; Matthew 26:35 _____

3. When We Rest In Christ, Christ's Power Rests In Us

2 Corinthians 12:9; John 1:14; 2 Corinthians 11:24-30; 2 Corinthians 12:10; Psalms 118:24; Psalms 84:11-12; Isaiah 41:10; Psalms 56:11 _____

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