

What do you do when God says no?

2 Corinthians 12:7-10 - 7 So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. 8 Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. 9 But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10 For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

I remember standing in the grocery store...I had to be about 8 years old...I saw this snicker candy bar that seemed to be calling my name I grabbed it and I turned to my dad who has always taken care of all my needs...I turned to my father who has always provided for me...I turned to my father who made sure I was never in need and said daddy I really need this snickers bar and in anticipation of him agreeing to my plea I begin to place it on the counter and my dad to my surprise said no...and took the candy and put it back on the shelf and as I begin to cry he said you will learn this lesson as you grow up but sometimes when you ask me for something I will say yes...sometimes I will say wait...but sometime because I am your father in light of the big picture I have to say no...It didn't stop me from wanting the candy, but I had to accept his answer why because he was my father.

Sometimes in our life we may be asking God for something and he is continually telling us no...the hurt is still there...the pain is still there...the sickness is still there...the relationship is still broken...the person is still our boss...the coworker is still getting on our nerves...the finances are still not what I expect...

But even though we ask...God is still saying no....So, what do you do when God says no?

Our text is 2 Corinthians 12:7-10. The audience of 2 Corinthians is the Corinthian church who is known for infighting and boasting, this is a church divided. In this particular section of this letter from Paul to the Corinthian church, Paul apparently has the need to defend himself as an apostle and be personal to the Corinthian church.

At the beginning of chapter 12 Paul is describing the opportunity he was given to get a glimpse of heaven and because of that we find him in a situation that causes him to plead for God to help him, but God says no....

From his experience I want us to see what we should do when God says no....There are three things I want you to learn from this message today, are you interested?

What do you do when God says no?

1. Admit your situation may be appointed by God.

2 Corinthians 12:7 So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited.

The word used for thorn in the Greek here signifies “something pointed,” like a sharp stake, a javelin, the point of a fishing hook, a splinter, or as it is translated here, a thorn. Paul wants us to get the understanding that this thing that is working to keep him humble is like someone has stabbed him with a knife, only the gauging never goes away. It is a stab that is endless. Paul says, my flesh is constantly being attacked by this gouging that I can’t pretend is not there. No pain killer removes it, this is not something that self-medication can fix. This won’t go away. This hurt, this agony, this piercing, it never leaves.

Then, we are confronted with a paradox. One and the same thorn was simultaneously given by God and used by Satan;

...to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me...

a gift from God is also an messenger of Satan. It is not that God is here working through Satan, or that there is dual agency or partnership, that is divine and demonic, but that Satan is active at the same time as God, and yet even further Satan is active at the same time as God, but only by God’s permission.

As Paul experienced his thorn, he discovered it to be both a tool of Satan....but he says don't get stuck on Satan’s role because this also and even more importantly is a gift from God. It is a tool from Satan because it inflicted suffering. It is a gift from God because it deflated pride.

While the infliction of suffering is Satan’s distinctive work. The deflation of pride is God’s distinctive work.

So, you may be praying for God to remove you from a situation and God is saying you are there because I put you there. This is not you at war against Satan, this is you being fashioned and fitted by God.

If there are areas in your life that are keeping God from using you the way He wants, He will carve those things away and carving and pruning hurts.

God may be showing you that you need to clean some areas of your life, and you let some of it go, but maybe not all of it...and it is hanging around.

It's what happened to Israel. They were instructed to drive the Canaanites out of the land and possess it, and to remove all their idols and the places that were used for idol worship. God tells them in Numbers 33:55:

Numbers 33:55 But if you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you, then those of them whom you let remain shall be as barbs in your eyes and thorns in your sides, and they shall trouble you in the land where you dwell.

What we see later is that Israel did not do as the Lord instructed and the results were a thorny situation.

Joshua 23:13 know for certain that the LORD your God will no longer drive out these nations before you, but they shall be a snare and a trap for you, a whip on your sides and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from off this good ground that the LORD your God has given you.

Israel let them hang around too long and they became a thorn...What have you let hang around too long, what bad habit, what bad people, what bad surroundings have you let hang around until it is now causing you trouble.

Paul had seen a vision of Heaven. He did not want to reveal all he knew but felt compelled to do so because of this Corinthian church that loved to brag about how spiritual they were.

We see this church's attitude in 1 Corinthians chapters 12 thru 14.

Paul opens 2 Corinthians chapter 12 stating that boasting is necessary, in this situation, but after he would have said all he could say about himself, what profit is it?

Some of us have gotten so proud of our own story, that we have forgotten that our story is the product of the grace of God not the power of man.

He tells this church, you are bragging about your different gifts, well I had the privilege of being raptured, escorted into the third heaven, and all it did was give me reason to keep my mouth shut about myself and open my mouth more about God.

Because of what I was allowed to see...because of the gifts that God allowed me to have...because of the privilege I have in being used by God...I still have no need to be the center of attention.

For someone, God is allowing you to experience a period of pain because you are the opposite...you won't move...you have gifts that you are not using...you have experiences that can help but you won't speak up....and God like a cattle prod is urging you to do something.

You know what a cattle prod is? It's the instrument they use to push cows who have gotten stuck and still and comfortable...the rancher will poke the cattle and it causes the cow to jump from its place and get going....

You are asking God why am I going through this...God why am I being persecuted...God why won't anything work and God is poking you saying, because I need you to get out of your pitty party...I need you to get out of your comfort zone...I need you to stop being satisfied with mediocre and get moving...and I will keep poking until you get the message.

Paul says...I have a thorn in my flesh that will not allow me to be comfortable. And the thorn I have is not from Satan...it's from God...the thorn may be Satan, but it is not from Satan.

God in his sovereignty and omnipotence has at his disposal even Satan to use to form and fashion his people into what he wants them to be.

Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelation...it led to a surpassing hardship. The level of greatness that God intends to elevate you too will determine the level of suffering God allows you to experience.

The hardship that God initiates and allows is necessary in order to spiritually prepare you for the next stage of usefulness by God.

Before he can fully use you he has to completely break you. Because he wants you to know when he places you where he wants you...you know it was God who put you there.

The temptation is to think that your giftedness is due to your hard work...the temptation is to think that your success is due to your bloodline and your networking ability...the temptation is to believe in yourself more than you believe in God.

The popular statement is believe in yourself...if you believe in yourself you can do whatever you want to do...what this does is create a self-sufficient mindset that causes one to think they are the cause of their success and platform.

When the only reason you should believe in yourself is if yourself has surrendered to God, understanding that at any time God sees it necessary to unplug you from your reality you are at the mercy of his hand.

This is not popular teaching. That's like a Christmas tree bragging about being lit up. Look at how shiny I am...look at how sparkly my colors are...look at all the lights I have...when all one has to do is unplug the tree from the wall and the lights are gone out...all the tree did was where what was put on it.

To keep us humble to catapult us into service we must understand that our situation may actually be appointed by God.

What to do when God says no, 1-Admit your situation may be appointed by God.

2 Accept God's grace in exchange for relief.

2 Corinthians 12:8 Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. 9 But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

Paul is under duress. This issue is effecting him greatly. There are many theories on what exactly he was dealing with whether it was a mental issue or a physical issue...there are some things we clearly know about this issue....

It was hurting because it was described as a thorn...it was humbling, because it kept him from being conceited and thinking too much of himself...it was humiliating, as he says he was tormented, pummeled, picked on by Satan.

This thing, whatever it was, was so overwhelming to Paul that he asked the Lord to remove it three times...Paul prayed for relief.

This was an earnest heart felt plea. The text says, Paul “Pleaded” – begged.

It was a repeated plea, gees he asked three times and there is not much significance to asking three times other than Paul was trying to let us know that it was bothering him so much that he continued to ask God to remove this frustration from him.

Never the less, when Paul sought God for relief, when Paul begged God to remove this trial, to take away this thorn...it was denied!

God’s response was not what he expected. The Lord’s answer was not simply no, but he offers an explanation...my grace is sufficient...the trouble you are dealing with right now will not go away right now, but I will show myself even stronger in your trouble.

I can imagine Paul had heard the stories of how Jesus healed the lepers, yet God did not tell him to go and wash yourself three times in the waters of the Jordan.

I can imagine Paul had heard of the time when the woman who had the issue of blood touched his garment and was made whole...yet God’s response was not find a priest and touch His garment and you will be made whole.

I can imagine Paul had heard of the time when the Roman Guard told Jesus you don’t need to come to my house I am a man of authority and I know you are too, just say the word and I know my daughter will be healed...and Jesus says go for your faith has healed your daughter...yet God did not say Paul for all the work you have done and all the faith you have shown...Your faith has healed you go and peace.

No, when Paul approached God continually in distress wanting relief from what he was going through...God says...my grace is sufficient.

Notice Paul expresses his request in past tense...yet the Lord answers in the present tense...

Paul says I asked and I asked and I heard nothing, but when God finally answered, it was clear enough that Paul won't have to ask him again...I asked, past tense, and He answered, my grace IS sufficient, present tense. Meaning an ongoing sufficiency.

Christ assures Paul that the supply of his grace for the carrying out of Paul’s ministry, and specifically for the bearing of the pain and buffeting of this thorn, would never run dry.

He needed nothing more than Christ’s grace. Having that, he had the strength to endure all things and to do all things to the glory of God.

The phrase means not only is my grace going to cover you right now, but whenever you encounter any trouble, my grace will continue to be sufficient!

The more trouble you have the more present I will show myself. I won’t take you out of the fiery furnace...but I will get in there with you...I won’t take you out of the flood...but I will give you an Ark to ride in...I won’t remove the people who are giving you trouble...but I will give you the ability to see me

while looking in their face...I won't remove all the pain from your body, but I will give you a song to sing while you are going through.

I may not give you the answer you want...I may not give you the relief you think you need...but I will make my presence known right in the middle of your pain.

I was afraid of the dark but my daddy did not cut light on but he put his hand on my shoulder ...the darkness didn't leave...but his presence was made known.

God wants us to know, even when he does not directly take you out of the pain or trouble, he will make himself known in the middle of your trouble.

What do you do when God says no...

1-Admit your situation may be appointed by God, 2-Accept God's grace in exchange for relief.

3 Allow your weakness to make you stronger.

Paul said because I have been appointed this thorn and God has said no to relief, but yes to Grace, my only choice is to allow this thing I am going through to grow me and make me stronger.

Listen to the Message Bible translation of 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 - Because of the extravagance of those revelations, and so I wouldn't get a big head, I was given the gift of a handicap to keep me in constant touch with my limitations. Satan's angel did his best to get me down; what he in fact did was push me to my knees. No danger then of walking around high and mighty! 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. Once I heard that, I was glad to let it happen. I quit focusing on the handicap and began appreciating the gift. It was a case of Christ's strength moving in on my weakness. Now I take limitations in stride, and with good cheer, these limitations that cut me down to size—abuse, accidents, opposition, bad breaks. I just let Christ take over! And so the weaker I get, the stronger I become.

We can see that Paul had Received Gods grace, because even though he endures this trial and many other trials he is later able to write Philippians 4:13 I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.

Paul accepts, this is not so that I can believe in myself more, but that I can trust in God more.

God says my power is perfected in weakness..now we need to know that the grace of God and the power of .god are used in a synonymous way so that it seems to tell us that when you experience the grace of God you also experience the power of God...and the best way to allow for Gods favor to cover you and keep you with his power is to totally release yourself of the obligation.

The longer you think you have to be strong and work things out...the less grace and power of God will you experience. The more weak you present yourself and the more assured you are of your inability, the stronger and more perfect does Gods power show itself in your life.

It literally means...when you are weak, God's grace and power reach its full potential...God's risen power finds its full scope and potency in your acknowledged weakness.

And I like the fact that they both are in the present...my grace is and my power is...this indicates they both are renewable assets.

David says it like this...surely goodness and mercy shall follow me....Verse 9 says..my grace and my power will continually be available...they will continue to fill you as long as you stay empty.

To show weakness means being vulnerable...it means admitting failure...Paul message to us from The Lord is...the more vulnerable you are the emptier you are the more space you provide for God to fill you with his power and grace.

When Paul received the word of the Lord that grace and power come with showing your weakness...Paul said well instead of bragging about my successes...let me brag about how weak I am...let me brag about how much I'm insulted...let me brag about how much I am abused.

2 Corinthians 12:10 For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

That's why I am not afraid to tell you I need prayer...that why I am not afraid to admit I am beat down. That's why I am not afraid to admit I need you to survive...because that's when God says, "he is emptying himself...let me fill him with grace...let me overflow him with power."

Paul says when I boast in my weakness..the power of Christ will dwell in me...the term means to pitch a tent. When the power of Christ pitched its tent over Paul, there was not only divine empowering for life and service but also divine protection, as a tent protects its inhabitants...when you show your weakness and admit your shortcomings...and accept your position...you can then be filled and covered with the grace and power of God...so you can see your trouble from God's perspective.

So that when I see trouble...I have been conditioned to see it from God's perspective...when my body is wrecking with pain...I can see my pain through the perspective of God...When I am punished by man...I can see those people who want to harm me from the perspective of God.

What does looking at these situations from God's perspective do?

It causes you to see trouble from the perspective of God who can tell the wind and the sea to be quiet.

It causes you to look at pain understanding that it has to be temporary in the face of the Eternal.

It causes you to look at created beings with bad attitudes from the view of the creator who judges the good and the bad.

Because of his grace and power I don't mind being weak...I don't mind being emptied...because when I get emptied...then I can get filled.

When he was little, one of my son's came to me with a cup of water and said daddy I want some juice...but I said I can't give you any juice because your cup is too full...if you empty your cup...I can fill it with the sweet stuff.

When God seems to say no and you have been in your pain and frustration for so long...you can stand and act as if you got it under control...but your cup will be too full..you can act as though you are strong by yourself...but your cup will be too full...or you can lay yourself on the alter and tell God...I'm broken...I'm tired...I'm hurt...I'm empty...and let God fill you with the sweet stuff...fill you with his power...fill you with his grace ...fill you with his joy...fill you over and over and over...because he will never lose his power..

What do you do when God says no?

1-Admit your situation may be appointed by God.

2-Accept God's grace in exchange for relief.

3-Allow your weakness to make you stronger.

As long as you accept your weakness, his power and grace will be perfected in you.

And the church said, Amen!