

My Grace Is Sufficient For You

I hope everyone had a wonderful Christmas this past week! I hope you enjoyed your families, and I hope you celebrated the incarnation of Jesus our savior with great joy and thankfulness.

But now that Christmas has passed, our minds inevitably turn to the New Year.

Personally, I really enjoy New Years. I like thinking about the past year and the good things God has done, and how He has shown me his steadfast love.

God has been so good to me this past year, and he has been so good to Northridge Life Church!

But even more than thinking about the past year, it's exciting to think about the coming year. What might God have in store for me this year? How can this year be better than the last? How might I better myself this year?

It's the time of year that many of us make New Years resolutions, and typically those resolutions are centered around improving ourselves in some way.

I want to be stronger, healthier, thinner, richer, nicer, holier...

About 9 years ago I decided I wanted to bulk up and put some muscle on my bones. I started a really strenuous workout program and gained about 20 lbs of muscle in 3 months.

Then I had 3 kids, stopped working out and ended up back where I started.

But the point is, I had a vision of what I wanted to be...what I wanted to look like.

Most of us have a vision of what we would like ourselves to look like, and how we would like others to perceive us.

But as Christians, here's the question! What does God want me to look like? What does Jesus want to make out of this life of mine. How does God want to glorify Himself through me?

2 Corinthians 12:7-10:

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. Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. 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. 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.

Paul states in this passage that a thorn in his flesh, a messenger of Satan, has been sent to torment him. And guess what...he doesn't like it.

Now, we don't know exactly what this thorn in his flesh was. I could have been a person, or group of people working against him and causing trouble in his ministry. It could have been a physical ailment or disease that he was suffering from.

We don't know for sure, but we know it's something that caused great difficulty in Paul's life, and we know that he asked, and in fact pleaded with God to take it away.

How many of you have ever faced a significant trial in your life?

And what's the first thing we do when trials come? We ask God to take them away!

This is how we tend to respond to suffering. God, take this away!

Paul pleads for this thorn to be removed from his life...and God doesn't do it. So he pleads a second time (maybe God didn't hear the first time)...nothing! He asks a third time.

And this time God does respond, but maybe not the way Paul had envisioned.

My grace is sufficient for you, because my strength is displayed through your weakness!

Paul's vision for his life is less suffering, so he pleads with the Lord to take it away, and God says, "No, because I have something even better for you".

We see in the passage here that it's God's will and good purpose to highlight and expose Paul's weakness.

And this is the apostle Paul we're talking about. He had a lot to hang his hat on. Circumcised on the 8th day; a Jew of the tribe of Benjamin; a Hebrew of Hebrews; a Pharisee full of zeal and legalistic righteousness.

In other words, Paul was the guy that every other religious guy wanted to be like!

But then Paul met Jesus. He beheld the glory of Jesus and his gospel...that the Son of God came into the world to save sinners...and he was never the same again.

He recognized that God would be glorified, not through his strength and accomplishments and his vain attempt at self righteousness.

No, God would be glorified through his weakness and his dependence.

This is a theme we see over and over again throughout Scripture. God uses weak, broken, unqualified people in order to display His grace and His power.

Abraham: he was too old.

Jacob: he was the second born, and he was deceitful.

Joseph: he was a slave.

Moses: he was a coward who couldn't speak very well.

Gideon: he was an insignificant guy with a tiny army.

David: he was a boy who took care of sheep.

The Disciples: they were a bunch of uneducated fishermen from Galilee.

Paul: He was a religious fanatic actively working against God's church.

Do we have any weak, unqualified people here today? That's good, because God is ready to display his grace and his strength through you!

1 Corinthians 1:26-31:

For consider your calling brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."

If we continue to read further in 1 Corinthians we find out that the Corinthian Christians had become arrogant.

They were starting to think pretty highly of themselves.

Hey, we're a pretty big deal!

We're kings! We have everything we need!

And Paul calls them out. He says, wait a minute. Remember what you were when God saved you. You are in Christ, not because of anything you did, but because of what God did for you!

That's the gospel: You are weak! And you can do nothing to save yourself, but Christ stepped in and did everything on your behalf!

So boast in the Lord! And not just when things are going well. Boast in Jesus when you're suffering, because through your suffering His glory will be displayed more clearly!

So with that in mind I want to propose a few New Years resolutions to you.

Let us embrace our weakness, so that Christ's strength may be displayed in us and through us.

Matthew 5:3

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

The kingdom of God is reserved for those who recognize that they don't deserve to be a part of the kingdom of God.

To be poor in spirit is to recognize your own spiritual bankruptcy and to thank God for his grace which is greater than all our sin.

We bring nothing to the table. The only way we can approach Jesus is beating our breast like the sinful tax collector and saying “God have mercy on me a sinner”.

The world doesn't need a bunch of weak Christians foolishly pretending to be strong.

The world needs Christians who recognize their weakness, their poverty, their inability...and delight in the fact that God loves to work through weak people.

So this next year lets boast in the fact that we're weak, and that God loves to display his strength through weak people.

2. Let us thank God for the suffering in our lives, knowing that it serves as a reminder of the sufficiency of God's grace and that we are absolutely dependent on his strength for every moment of our lives.

This last week was a rough week for us. Like most of you, we had had a really busy season leading up to Christmas. We got through it, left town to see Caty's family, and right as we thought we were going to get to rest and relax a little, we get a phone call from my sister that our house is flooding.

At first we thought it was just a leak in the wall. Then we got the news that it was in fact a slab leak and was going to be really expensive to fix. They thought they might be able to do a bypass through the ceiling, but that didn't work out either, so they had to drill a massive hole in our laundry room.

So they drill a giant hole and then figure out they drilled the hole in the wrong place. Now they have to drill an even bigger hole right in front of our bedroom.

When we get home our house is a construction site. We have giant mounds of dirt in our kitchen and hallway. The house is filthy and we have no running water for the next few days. Then Ellie gets sick.

Then Caty gets sick.

Then Ellie hurts her foot and we have to take her to urgent care.

Then Jude starts to get sick.

We are falling apart at this point. Tempers are short. Nobody feels good. And then I get a text from pastor Marc on Friday.

He has the flu and is wondering if I can lead the service on Sunday.

I'm not sure if I laughed or cried at this point. Maybe both. But my reaction was, “this is the worst possible time you could have ever asked me to do this...there's no way I can do that this week”.

And God whispers: my grace is sufficient for you.

The beauty of suffering is that it reminds us to stop trying to be strong, and to fall on the Lord and rely on his mercy.

And we need to be reminded of that!

So when the trials come, instead of immediately asking God to take them away, first ask Him to give you a heart that relies fully on him.

Ask Him to give you the grace to endure suffering well for the sake of His glory and your sanctification.

3. And finally, let us learn to help and encourage each other as a community as we seek to let God's strength shine through our weakness.

Galatians 6:2

Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

Weak Christians need other weak Christians to help them and remind them to rely and depend fully on Christ's strength.

God's glory shines most brightly through a community of believers embracing their weakness and God's strength together.

Whatever this new year holds for you and for me, I pray we embrace our weakness, that we rejoice in suffering, and that we do it together as the body of Christ.

May we be a church that boasts in our weakness, that God's strength and glory might be exalted for all to see!

So it's appropriate that we end this year and begin the next by going to the Lord's table together.

In communion we have the opportunity to corporately declare our weakness and Christ's strength.

We come to the table with nothing...broken and poor, but in Christ we receive everything!

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.