

**"Overcoming Weakness" - II Corinthians 12:7-10**

Shall we turn to 2 Corinthians 12:7-10, and really what it is to overcome weakness within your life – “overcoming weakness”. There are many great universities that you could look around the world. You could see Harvard, you could see Yale, and you could see SC, UCLA. In fact one of our worship people, his wife and he both graduated. One went to UCLA the other one went to SC and that would be a difficult thing, I would think, during the game who they are going to live with or what they are going to do. Then I think if you go across the sea you could go back to Oxford there in England. And even if you look at Paul’s life he was in the University of Tarsus under the Professor of Gamaliel, probably the most brilliant mind that has ever been born there concerning theology, which is Paul the Apostle. But there is one other university that has more students, has more graduates, tradition is pricey, and the experiences are priceless. And that is really that university of “hard knocks”. And that’s the one that God allowed Paul to get inside.

And when God desires to use your life, or when God desires to bring your marriage to the very best, or when God desires to do something far beyond what you could ever believe, then often times He will bring you in to that moment that things do not make sense. And it’s in that difficult time that God wants you to know that **“in your weakness His strength is made perfect.”** (2 Corinthians 12:9) And the very thing that you are fighting, and the very thing that you are trying to overcome, is actually something that He has sent. And so you find yourself fighting against God. Because the one thing that we know in our life is that, for a guy, we are to be like John Wayne. God help us if we ever become like Don Knotts. We are to be that John Wayne of the Bible; we can take six shots and keep on walking. But it doesn’t work that way because we deal with

failure, we deal with insecurity, we deal with rejection. Some of the different ladies go through difficult times and so we are constantly overcome by our failure and our weaknesses and we cover them up hoping that we will never have to deal with it. But God desires that you would understand something this morning: that it's in that moment of your weakness that **"God's strength will be perfect in your life."** And it's in that moment of your sorrow that **"His song is going to begin to rise within your heart."** (Psalm 42:8) And it is in that moment of confusion that Christ is going to be crystal clear. And it is in that moment of discouragement that God is going to show you the destiny of your life.

And so we come to (2 Corinthians 12:7 -10), and I have to tell you, out of all the years that I've ever taught I think that this one study is for me more than anyone else. But there are four things that we are going to take a look at: In verse 7, I want you to underline the word "give me", because he is going to share with you that this thorn was given to him. And so find verse 7, and underline "given unto me". And then in verse 8, would you underline "this thing". This thing, this horrible thing you are going through, God knows all about it and so underline "this thing" in verse 8. Then in verse 9, would you underline "He said unto me" or "He said", in other words in the midst of the pain, in the midst of the loneliness, in the midst of the agony or the failure, God is seeking and trying to speak to your heart. And He will say to you that this is an instrument in the hand of God. Though Satan brought it, Jesus Christ is going to purify it. So no matter what happens to you things are going to work out for your good. And then he said in verse 10, **"for Christ"**. In other words, I believe with all my heart that Paul came to understand the secret to have "victory in the situation" is to see Jesus Christ lifted high upon that cross.

And so we come to verses 7-10 this morning. And it should be a fun time as we just kind of tear apart these verses, **“And lest I should be exalted** (in other words, that he would become prideful above measure) **that through the abundance of the revelation** (the inside into heaven fourteen years ago in Lystra) **there was given to me** (and underline that) **a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure.”** (2 Corinthians 12:7) And so he starts in verse 7, **“that I should be exalted...”** (and then he ends with) **“I should be exalted.”** **“For this thing I besought the Lord three times that it might depart from me.”** In verse 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 weakness, that the power of Christ might rest upon me.”** And then in verse 10, **“Therefore** (always pointing back to something that has been said before) **I take pleasure, I rejoice in the weakness, in reproach, in necessity, in persecution, in distress, for Christ’s sake: for when I’m weak, then I’m strong.”** And verse 10 is the clincher, **“Therefore, I take pleasure, I rejoice in my weakness, I rejoice in my reproach, in my necessity, in my persecution, in my distress for Christ’s sake for when I’m weak then I’m strong.”**

And I gotta to tell you that we really don’t believe that verse. But Paul is now laying out to us, really the hand of God and how God works in your life. And often times you will spend a lifetime begging God to get rid of something; hoping that God will get this thing out of your life. I hope it is not your spouse. But all of a sudden God get this person out of my life. Or even your children, Lord, they are sixty years old and still living at home, get rid of them it is time to get rid of them. But we find that very simply, that that thing you have been trying to get rid of has now become the very instrument that God has used to bring you to

the end of yourself. And the reason why, is that Paul said, **“that we were pressed out beyond measure”**. We have the sentence of death in our self that we would not trust in our self but that we would come to trust in the living God. Paul said, **“This light affliction, which works in us that eternal weight of glory.”** (2 Corinthians 4:17). You remember James says that, **“we have need of this in our life”**, this trial. (James 1) Peter went on to say that once again, **“when we are tried we will come forth as gold.”** (1 Peter 1:6-7) And James declared that, **“Count it all joy when you fall into diverse temptation knowing that the trying of your faith worketh patience and let patience have a perfect work that you might be complete in Christ.”** (James 1:2-4)

So, all the way through the Bible it talks about difficult times. But here in verses 7-10, I'd like to outline it in a very simple way to help you to understand. So in verse 7, we want to take a look at the purpose of the thorns, and then in verse 8, the problem with the thorns, and then in verse 9, the provision of the thorns, and then lastly in verse 10, the power in the thorns.

So in verse 7, he goes on to say here is the purpose of these thorns. **“And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelation, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.”** (2 Corinthians 12:7) So **“lest I should be exalted”** there was going to be given to me a thorn. And this thorn now in Paul's life was going to now change and become important within his life. Fourteen years prior to this, God opened his eyes; he was able to be in heaven seeing the things of God. Because of that great moment, that great revelation, when he went back to the earth God understood that Paul was going to have a problem. And to keep Paul balanced,

to keep Paul from ruining the work that God was doing in his life, there was a messenger of Satan to buffet his body. We don't know what it was, we believe that it was a "thorn" and the word thorn in the Greek is not a sliver it really is a word that means "tent post". It is about 18 inches long and they would drive these posts into the desert to hold these Bedouin tents. It was something that Paul said was crippling, that became a handicap within his life that caused him so much pain that he began to cry out to God: "get this thing out of my life; I cannot serve you with this in the way." It became a major problem for Paul. And all of a sudden he begins to cry out: "God, move this thing out of my life."

I think Thursday night we saw the very same thing with Habakkuk. We nicknamed him Hab, I like that, it's easier. Oh, Hab! Because it was God, you remember, that was speaking to Habakkuk, and Habakkuk was saying, "Now God what are you doing?" And God said, "If I told you, you would not believe. I'm going to bring the Chaldeans, they are going to rape your children, they are going to destroy your families, they are going to kill your old men, and they are going to annihilate the southern kingdom of Judea." Habakkuk was devastated so the bible says he climbed to the tower because he couldn't understand God. His whole philosophy, his whole theology, his whole basis of belief was shattered because he thought that God was good. And he thought that God was Holy, and he thought that God was going way over board. But then God began to show him the sins of the people. And in that whole moment of Habakkuk's life, in the midst of the trial, though God was not going to stop it and the Chaldeans were coming, and there were going to be many who perished, Habakkuk began to understand that these Chaldeans were now the instrument in the hands of God, to purify the people of God to bring them to a point that they would return back to God.

And in the same way God is working in your life allowing things to happen to bring you closer to Christ. To purify your life much like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. It was, you remember, those three boys, that were thrown into the fiery furnace and Nebuchadnezzar said, **"Heat it up seven times. Tie these boys up and throw them inside. And Nebuchadnezzar looked inside, he said, 'Lo, I see four men, how many did we throw in? And the fourth looks like the Son of God.' And they were released, walking untied and rejoicing."** (Daniel 3:19-26) And Nebuchadnezzar had to ask them to come out of the trial because they were having more fun in this trial than outside. And you are saying, "Steven you are sick!" I know. Paul was saying, "I enjoy this pain, I thank God for this trial, I need this thorn in my life." And the reason why was because of the revelation. God was doing a work in his life. And because God was doing a work, God was going to keep him humble, and God was committed. Now listen to me, God was committed to keep this man humble so he would not lose the work that God wanted to do in his life.

And God is not afraid to work in your life nor to keep you humble nor to allow things to happen to you to bring you to a point of weakness so He might be strengthened and He might be glorified in your life. The greatest curse in your life is your strength because in my strength I do not seek God. I do not look to God. I tend to solve my problems. But when life begins to fall apart I cry out. And God is asking. God remove this pain and my agony. Even the children in Israel they saw the manna as a curse. And they begged God to take the manna away. And when God finally took it away and gave them quail the Bible declares that because of the leanness of their soul they were seriously in trouble. It was the manna that God wanted them to have, but they murmured and complained.

And we often times will complain and murmur and gripe because of the things going on in our life. And we don't see anything good about what is happening in our life. We don't like our boss. We don't like where we work. We don't like the situation. We are having difficult times in relationships, things are against us. We are constantly fighting the system. And God is saying, "Time out, My life is committed to you, and this thorn is important to you." And Paul now says here, **"lest I should be exalted above measure"** (in other words, to become lifted up with pride), **because of the great revelation "there was given to me** (and that's the key, God gave him this thorn) **the messenger of Satan** (God transformed it and brought it to be a purifying work) **and he buffets me"** (and the reason why it's so that I would not be stumbled). (2 Corinthians 12:7)

You remember he says in (1 Corinthians 1:27-29), **"But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God has chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty;** (now listen) **and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence."** And so though Satan seeks to destroy you, God is seeking to vindicate your life. Though the Chaldeans were now going to destroy the Southern Kingdom, God was going to destroy the Chaldeans and God was going to resurrect once again the nation of Israel. But God needed an instrument and God was willing to use whatever it would take in my life. And so the purpose of the thorn is to bring humility. Understand that. The purpose of the trials, the purpose of the difficulties, is to bring a brokenness upon your life.

And then in verse 8, he mentions the problem with the thorns. He says, **"And this thing I besought the Lord three times that it might depart from**

**me."** Boy, God, get rid of this thing. There is no way that I can handle this. This is foolish in my life. God surely you don't want me going through this difficult time. And Paul fervently sought the Lord three different times to ask God to get rid of this horrible, painful, experience within his life. And I find it interesting that God said, "No." It was the very same thing, you remember, in the garden that Jesus said, **"Let this cup pass,"** (Mathew 26:39) and the Father said, "No." It was the same moment that Paul was saying, "Let this thorn go," and God said, "No." And it's the very same thing in your life, "God please remove this obstacle" and God might be saying to you, "No." And you might be saying, "For how long?" And it might be for the rest of your life. With Jesus it was all the way to the cross. With Paul God said, "Don't ever talk to Me about this again. This is the thorn, this is needed in your life, and this is the only thing that will keep you broken and humble before me." And God is more concerned with that work in your heart and in your spirit, taking you higher and beginning to bring you to a place of complete dependency upon the Lord. And so he says here, once again, **"For this thing I besought the Lord three times."** "But God the pain. Lord the hospitals! God the cancer! God get rid of this thing and I would serve you with all my heart. God give me somebody else in this relationship and we could do so much better." But how do you know that the very things that you are going through today have not been given to you by the very hand of God to keep you where you are and to keep you crying out for the mercy of God within your life? And so maybe the other person is not the answer; maybe it's not your boss, maybe it's not your spouse, maybe it's not even your job, maybe the real issue is you. Maybe the very things that are happening in you--the hurt, the brokenness, the devastation--is all part of the hand of God to keep you broken and humble before Him crying out to Him. And three times, you remember, Christ prayed, **"Father let this cup pass."** (Mathew 26:39) And three times the Father said, "No." And Jesus said, "For the

joy that is set before Me I endure the cross.” And I just want to share with you, that you can pray your whole life to get rid of something but it might be the very thing that is going to make you. You can pray to get rid of a situation but it might be the very stepping stones to bring you to the man or to the woman that God desires you to be.

And then thirdly in verse 9, the provision for the storm, **“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 weakness, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.”** A couple of thoughts here: We see first of all in verse 9, that in my weakness Your strength is made perfect. So here is what God is saying that if you will allow your weakness to be honest, if you are not afraid to humble yourself and acknowledge the weakness of your life then “I’m not afraid to fill you with the power that made the heavens and the earth.” And the reason why the people are not seeing more of the hand of God within our life is because people are so afraid of being weak. We live our whole life trying to be strong, but in reality it’s just the opposite in the kingdom of God. In this society we show our strength by our military power, how we can take Iraq. But in the kingdom of God you show your strength by your weakness, by its God working in you and through you to His good, his glory. And when you do become strong then you become weak with God, and then you become to have all the problems within your life. And so he declares here, **“My grace is sufficient for thee: my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore I would rather glory in my weakness, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.”** Not only is the weakness something that God wants to strengthen, but notice he says “gladly”. In other words the sorrow, God wants to bring salvation that in the weakness of my pain, the emptiness of my life, when everything is falling apart and there is no song in my heart. And I

look around like Habakkuk, and I say, "There are no figs on the tree, there is nothing in the barns, and there is nothing in the icebox and yet God you want me to rejoice?" And God says again, "I'm bringing this into your life and the reason is because I want my people back." So God is willing to bring me to an empty place. God wants to sing His life in my heart, like Zephaniah God will sing over you. And it is something that we do not need to be afraid of.

And lastly in verse 9, look at the word "rest upon" because this is the keeper of the whole thing. In the Old Testament it means the tabernacle. It's the word used for the tabernacle where Christ will come and tabernacle among us. And what he is saying in a very profound way is if you will allow your weakness to be seen by God, then God will come and tabernacle among you and you will become a "pillar of strength". But if you are not willing to humble yourself and allow the weakness to be manifested and you continue to operate in this area of pride you will never see the power or the glory of God to tabernacle among you, because God cannot allow His glory to be part of that flesh. And so you think, "Well now wait a second Steve, are you saying that in my weakness it's good? Yeah! Are you saying that this thorn is sent by God? Yes. Give me one good reason: because God gave him heaven! If I could say to you this morning, "I can guarantee that you will see heaven." Would you be willing to have a difficult day in your life? Amen! "For a glimpse of heaven, I'll go through hell. Just give me a glimpse of heaven." And that is what Paul did. He had a glimpse of heaven and God said, "Paul, for the rest of your life I'm going to have to balance you out." And when God begins to work in your life to balance you, to keep you broken, to keep you searching, to keep you humble, it is a wonderful day in your life.

And then lastly, not only has He become the provision, but notice in verse 10, it says that thorn becomes a "place of power". And this is kind of exciting in verse 10, **"Therefore I take pleasure in weakness, I rejoice in my weakness, in my reproach, in the necessities of my life, in the persecutions, and in my distress (and I told you to underline) for Christ's sake."** And this is where, I believe, that Paul really came to understand his trial. Because it was on the cross, you remember 2000 years ago that Christ went, humbled Himself and took upon Him the form of a servant. And in that moment of weakness God placed the sins upon the world. And there from that cross, as He was nailed, He reached out and He ministered, **"Father, forgive them for they don't know what they are doing."** (Luke 23:34) He looked down and He said, **"John behold your mother, Mother behold John."** (John 19:25-27) So in the midst of His pain, in the midst of His agony, He was able to minister and He was able to give life. Now that is what God is doing. So with that cross came a crown, the crown of thorns, but now I stand in salvation. I believe that Paul finally came to understand that in the crucified life, that in the cross of Christ, that if Jesus could die and go the way of the cross and humble Himself, then so can he. It was the cross of Christ that brought the crown, and it was the cross of Christ that brought sense to what was going on. You say, "Well, you're telling me that Paul was beaten five times?" Yep! Thirty-nine times each time! He was beaten with rods three different times by the Roman government. He was shipwrecked and went through three different shipwrecks. He went through hunger, and pain, and agony. He was stoned in Lystra. You say, "Well, now time out! That is too much." Well, hold on a second, do you think that he's blessed? He saw heaven! How would God be able to balance him out? You are thinking, "Oh, aint no way that I would want to live that life". Well, then you live without heaven.

You see if I desire to grow, if I desire to have the best marriage, the best single life. If I desire to be truly a man of God, to be a woman that's after God's heart. And God begins to grow me up and I begin to take steps. I just want to promise you, that God is going to take the steps to keep you humble. And when that thorn comes into your life and you begin to cry, and you blame everybody else, I just want to remind you that it was sent by God. And when you look around, and you say, "This thing, this thing is driving me crazy!" You might hear Him say, "Let's not talk about this anymore." "This thing, because "this thing is from My hands." And when your life is beginning to fall apart and you don't know what to do, you might even hear Him say, "Steven, this is Me; by the way My grace is sufficient. I'm the answer; not the finances, not the church, not going to Washington, D.C. I'm the answer of your life." And when I finally look around and see the power, I realize, so it is all about You, Jesus. So with the great revelation came a great buffeting. So it was not Satan, it was God. And I just want to tell you this morning you could blame everybody. You can blame Satan. You could blame your wife. You could blame your husband. You could blame the church, and you could blame the country. But I just want to remind you; this thorn that you can't shake it's a gift from your father. And so God is saying to you and to me, "Steven reach out your hand, I have a thorn for you." "Keep it! I don't want it!" "Oh, by the way Steven it is not a little prick. It is going to penetrate your heart; it is going to hurt." "Oh, why would you do that?" "You see, Steve, I've got to keep you humble. I've got to balance you, because I don't want to lose you my son." "Is there any other way?" "No! "There is no other way." There is one way, "God give me victory over this thing." "Oh, that's cool!" I would rather have you say, "God give me victory in this thing."

**Closing Prayer:**

Let's pray: Father, we thank You and we praise You for Your goodness and Your grace. And God, we look at the things that happen in our lives and sometimes we fight them, sometimes we just get so angry with You, become bitter, and we finally come to a point that we realize that You are everything to us. Lord, how foolish it is to understand that everything is tested. Lord, we fly in planes that have been tested. Lord, we go over the sides of cliffs on ropes that have been tested. And Lord, we have driven cars that have been tested, so why is it so hard for us to think that it is so wrong for You to test us?

I thank You, Lord, that Paul opened his heart, shared his experience in heaven and how that he was humbled. He was able to keep quiet for 14 years. And how he cried out to You to deliver him. But it was in this weakness that made him great. And it was in this sorrow that he began to sing. And it was in this discouragement that he began to get direction. And so he said very simply, "Give unto me this thing." He has said, "Christ." In Jesus' Name, Amen.