



## First Baptist Church At The Villages

COMPANION STUDY TO MESSAGE: CONFIDENCE THROUGH GOD'S GRACE (CHRIST'S POWER)

(6/21) •

STUDY TITLE: GOD'S PURPOSE IN OUR WEAKNESS • 2 CORINTHIANS 12:1-10 •

FOR USE 6/21/THROUGH 6/27/2020

### MAIN POINT

God's power is made manifest through the weaknesses and inabilities of man.

### INTRODUCTION

As your study time begins, use this section to focus your mind and heart on the topic of this lesson.

**How are powerful people treated in our society?**

**Why are we typically afraid to disclose our weaknesses to each other?**

We are typically drawn to people who are powerful—and confident in their power. Weakness, on the other hand, is ... well, weak. No one expects a weak athlete or a weak business to succeed. And isn't success what we all want?

This Bible study, though, is not about sports or business. It's about life. Whatever weaknesses we have can actually be opportunities for strengths, as they bring us to the One who empowers us. When we let Him, God will use the difficulties or infirmities we live with to do something great.

### UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| READ 2 CORINTHIANS 12:1-7.

**Consider your own weaknesses, be bold enough to write them down.**

**How do our weaknesses remind us that we cannot boast in ourselves?**

**What types of things or experiences are we tempted to boast about?**

**Why do you think Paul was hesitant to mention his vision?**

**What purpose did Paul's thorn serve in his own life?**

| READ 2 CORINTHIANS 12:8-9A.

**Name some ways that God gives us grace and strength to live with our weaknesses.**

**How do the Lord's words in verse 9 help us respond to the unbiblical "health, wealth, and success" gospel that is often marketed today?**

**What do we learn from this passage about the value of persistent prayer in relation to our weaknesses and problems?**

| READ 2 CORINTHIANS 12:9B-10.

**Share how you can use your weaknesses as opportunities to exalt Christ.**

**What can we learn from Paul's example about dealing with physical discomfort or hardship?**

**How does the Christian perspective on power and weakness differ from the world's perspective?**

**How should we respond if God chooses not to heal or take away our weakness?**

## CONTEMPLATION & APPLICATION

Identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to your own life.

**Are you going through a hardship, or enduring a "thorn in your side"? In what ways can you envision God taking this difficulty and making it serve a higher purpose?**

**How, specifically, can you allow the Lord's power to take over where you are weak?**

## PRAYER

As you pray, ask God to help you lean on His strength and grace as you acknowledge your weaknesses. Ask Him to show you how you can bring glory to Him even in weakness.

## COMMENTARY

## | 2 CORINTHIANS 12:1-10

12:1-6. Paul's boasting moved from his trials to visions and revelations he received. The phrase translated boasting is necessary (v. 1) indicates that Paul spoke of his own experiences only because the situation in Corinth had compelled him to do so. Although Paul was embarrassed to boast about a personal spiritual experience, the circumstances demanded it. Apparently, his critics had boasted of visions and ecstatic experiences they claimed to have. In contrast, Paul reluctantly told them about a genuine vision or revelation but gave God all the credit. Paul referred to visions and revelations of the Lord. By definition, a vision always is seen. On the other hand, a revelation may come by some other means than a vision.

Although 2 Corinthians 12:7 seems clearly to identify Paul as the man of verse 2, why did Paul refer to himself in the third person? According to one view, Paul did so because of modesty. Another possibility is that he did so because no human being can take credit for a divine vision. Other suggestions include that the reference to third person was a way of indicating the sacred nature of this experience for Paul or that he wanted to maintain a distinction between the Paul who had such a great experience and the Paul who boasted of his weaknesses. Whatever the reason, Paul lacked knowledge of whether he was in the body or out of the body.

According to verse 6, Paul admitted that if he boasted he would be telling the truth. Nevertheless, Paul refused to boast of such private spiritual experiences. He deliberately chose not to boast because others might give him the credit instead of giving God the credit. Paul always wanted others to glorify God rather than himself. Furthermore, Paul wanted others to evaluate him on the basis of his present performance, not on the basis of what happened years ago.

12:7-8. Apparently, Paul's main reason for referring to his unique revelation was to introduce the subject of his thorn in the flesh. The Greek word translated "thorn" also was used to designate "a stake," "a splinter," or "the pointed end of a fishhook." Although some interpreters hold that the term refers to a cross, thus, figuratively to self-crucifixion (Gal. 2:20), the evidence does not warrant such a view. Whatever the precise nature of his thorn in the flesh, Paul saw it as given to him to prevent his being overly exalted because of the revelations he experienced. What was Paul's thorn in the flesh? Three main theories about the thorn in the flesh are that it refers to: (1) physical affliction, (2) besetting temptation, and (3) persecutions. Many people believe that Paul purposefully did not identify his problem.

The phrase "messenger of Satan" probably refers to Satan as the source of Paul's thorn in the flesh. Therefore, we may ask: Did God or Satan give Paul his thorn in the flesh? Because Satan is the author of sin, disease, and death, he alone is the culprit. Since God, however, is sovereign and

omnipotent, everything Satan does must be according to God's permissive will. Paul distinguished between God's purpose in permitting the thorn as a test, to keep Paul from exalting himself (v. 7), and Satan's purpose in using it to tempt him by tormenting him, perhaps to get Paul to renounce God. Recall that Satan was allowed to afflict Job, but only within the limits set by God (Job 1–2). Paul implored the Lord three times for the thorn to be removed (v. 8). Prayer, of course, was the appropriate approach to Paul's difficulty. Yet even the prayer of this great man of faith was not answered by the removal of the thorn. Paul's experience reminds us that God sometimes answers prayer differently from what we ask or expect.

12:9-10. Although three times Paul requested God to remove his affliction, God did not take it away. Rather than removing Paul's thorn, God gave him something better. God gave Paul sufficient grace for Paul to rise above his thorn by depending on God's mighty power (v. 9). The term translated grace often has been defined as "undeserved, or unmerited, favor." The Greek verb translated is sufficient indicates "enough," or "adequate." The form of the verb indicates the continual availability of God's grace. The verb translated is perfected also means "completed," or "finished." Paul realized that God intended to bring him to a specific goal through the difficulty. Although that goal was not specified, Paul's weakness opened the way for God's power to flow through him. Through God's response to his prayer, Paul understood God's reason for his affliction. Thus he wrote verse 9. The final portion of verse 10 summarizes the lesson God taught Paul through his painful experience. Paul was able to apply this lesson to far more difficulties than his thorn in the flesh (see v. 10a).