Series: Finding Strength When You’re Taking Fire

**Finding Contentment When God Says No**

2 Corinthians 12:1-10 July 3, 2016

1. Embrace God’s Purposes in Suffering

a. Your strengths can be your greatest liabilities.

* V.2 *I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven.*
* What they saw as their strength, Paul sees as a liability that could lead to pride.
* V.6 *I refrain from it, so that no one may think more of me than he sees in me or hears from me.*
* Most people think about what they can do to make people think more of them. Paul strategizes about how he can keep people from thinking more of him.

b. There are some gifts you’ll never ask for.

* V.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.*
* Matthew Henry: Sometimes Christ sees that we need sickness for the good of our souls more than healing for the good of our bodies.

c. What Satan intends to harass you, God intends for blessing.

* V.7 *a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me*
* Genesis 50:20 *As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.*

Q. How can our strengths be liabilities in our lives? i.e. What is the danger of our strengths we need to watch out for?

Q. Paul discerns that one of the purposes of his trial is to develop humility. What other purposes does God have for trials?

Q. How can it help to recognize that often both Satan and God have a purpose in our suffering?

2. Embrace God’s Power in Suffering

a. We can both accept suffering and plead for its removal.

* V.8 *I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me.*

b. We can’t embrace God’s power without trusting in the sufficiency of His grace.

* V.9 *But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”*
* 2 Corinthians 4:16-17 *16 So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. 17 For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison*

c. We can’t embrace God’s power without accepting our weakness.

* V.9 *Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.*
* D. A. Carson: If this is true, then the self-proclaimed strengths of the false apostles mean they are devoid of grace! ... Grace responds to need, acknowledged weakness, spiritual destitution. The kingdom of heaven goes to the poor in spirit (Matt. 5:3).
* Chuck Colson: Every time I walk into a prison and see the faces of men or women who have been transformed by the power of the living God, I realize that the thing God has chosen to use in my life … is none of the successes, achievements, degrees, awards, honors, or cases I won before the Supreme Court. What God is using in my life to touch the lives of literally thousands of other people is the fact that I was a convict and went to prison. That was my great defeat, the only thing in my life I didn't succeed in.

Q. What does God mean when He says, *“My grace is sufficient”*?

Q. What are some of the weaknesses this passage seems to be calling you to accept?

Q. Have you experienced the power in weakness promised here?

3. Embrace God’s Saviour in Suffering

a. We have a Saviour who suffered as we have.

* V.8 *Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this.*
* Matthew 26:44 *So, leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words again.*

b. We have a Saviour who suffered for us.

* Isaiah 53:3-5 *3 He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. 4 Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. 5 But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.*

c. We can bear suffering with contentment because of Jesus.

* V.10 *For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities.*
* 1 Peter 2:21 *For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.*
* Tim Vanderveen: "I have learned that life is not like a PVR. You can't fast forward the bad parts. But I have learned that Jesus Christ is in every frame, and right now that's just enough."

Q. How can Christ’s sufferings be an encouragement to us in our trials? What can we do to experience this encouragement?

Q. What do you think Tim Vanderveen meant when he said that it was enough that “Jesus Christ is in every frame” of his life?

**Notes:**