

Epiphany Moments 6) Power is Perfected in Weakness

2 Corinthians 12:7-10 • 2025-02-16 • Series: Epiphany Moments



Those of you who have attempted to repair something know there is a certain rule. My dad likes to point out the frequent occurrence of “Murphy’s Law.” If something can go wrong in a project, it will go wrong. A simple job of replacing the brake pads on a car can turn into dealing with a rusted bolt that refuses to move and must be drastically drilled out. My son and I found out not too long ago how a simple replacement of a toilet flush valve can turn into an ordeal. It is only supposed to take about ten minutes. But after an hour the two of us were struggling with a most persistent bolt that had long ago rusted into an unrelenting example of Murphy’s law. It’s hard enough to do tasks when things are going well. But when you get a wrench tossed in your path it can make life miserable. There was a popular book that came out a few years ago about a Green Beret, Ivan Castro who accomplished things that most people would consider a lifetime achievement. He ran marathons and even skied on an expedition to the South Pole. What made his feats so remarkable is that he is completely blind. He was injured while serving as a sniper in Iraq and became blind. He fought on in life to push himself to accomplish great things. While my son and I were repairing that toilet valve, I thought about all the things Castro boasted about being able to do while blind. And I just knew what his greatest boast was as a blind man: he boasted about fixing a leaking toilet valve.

Do you ever wonder why God has Christians facing various challenges and weaknesses? Why does “Murphy’s Law” seem to always apply to Christian service and ministry? Why do Christians face setbacks? Today we have another Epiphany moment as we see just why Christians face hardships, setbacks, and live with weaknesses.

If anyone had life cut out for them to achieve greatness it was the apostle, Paul. And he did experience many great things. He had the privilege of seeing the risen Jesus appear to him and speak directly with him. Paul had the Spirit enlighten him and provide him with divine inspiration to record the Word of God. Paul experienced the power of miracle working. On his first missionary journey God granted Paul the ability to perform miraculous signs, wonders, and healing. And as if this wasn’t enough for Paul, he was given the gift of speaking in tongues -something many of the Churches respected and admired. More than that even he had the gift of receiving special visions and was even taken up to see a vision of paradise with heaven opened.

But these great things are exactly why Paul was given a great setback. He says, “In order to keep me from becoming arrogant there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me.” Paul called his setback “a thorn in the flesh.” He doesn’t tell us exactly what it was. The picture is clear; it was something that afflicted him. This might just be a metaphor for something painful, or it may have literally been something in his body that was causing great pains. He says this thorn was a messenger of Satan. God is in absolute control of all things and does not cause evil. Yet God permitted a messenger of Satan to afflict Paul. In the same way that Satan was given free rein to afflict and torment Job, God allowed Satan to wreak havoc for Paul. Besides any physical ailment Paul faced many setbacks!

Why would God do such a thing? Paul was God’s chosen messenger to carry his gospel to the Gentiles! What sense did it make for God to allow Paul to face afflictions? You would think that God would protect him and prosper his every move. You would think that God would want Paul to have a smooth path. After all, who picks out their prize racehorse and doesn’t take great care of it? Who chooses a premium race car and doesn’t give it all that it needs with the best tires, the best pit crew, and the best fuel possible? But God gave his chosen apostle an affliction!

Paul has already identified one important reason. “In order to keep me from becoming conceited.” God took Paul down a notch to prevent him from getting puffed up and arrogant. Paul had his own sinful pride. It wouldn’t do for him to boast about his own greatness. So, in wisdom and love, God brought Paul down a few notches.

Brothers and sisters, we have many of the same advantages as Paul. You may not be an apostle, but you have the same degree of greatness given to Paul; you have the same baptism. God has placed his Holy Spirit on you and poured out his gifts to you. He has enlightened you and caused you to see with faith the goodness of his Word. He has opened your eyes to understand and believe the gospel. And through faith you have been justified, declared not guilty and free from sin’s curse. He put his name on you and called you his own child. And although you may not work many miracles like the apostles and Paul, you have the power of the gospel to change hearts. You have been given the same power that brought kings and nations to faith in Christ. And his Spirit works in you to produce fruits of faith and sanctifies you. And the same God who sanctifies you has promised that he will glorify you. You have not seen it all with your eyes like Paul did, but you will receive a kingdom that cannot be shaken. You are an heir of eternal life and royalty in the house of God. And with full confidence you can walk each day in the perfect peace and joy of salvation. Glory and the power of God are yours!

Do those who hold such gifts and privileges from God not have the same temptation to become puffed up? How easy it is for us when things go well to believe that this is all for our own sake. When you are healthy, free from troubles, and full of blessings you can, like all the saints before you, fall into the trap of arrogance. “Of course, I’m a Christian. Of course I can serve my God. Of course I’m an heir of eternal life. I’m the best!” Or so we think until our God gives us a most important reality check about why we have his blessings.

I don't know what has afflicted you as a Christian. Paul lists things that he has faced which included persecution, insults, hardships, sickness, and all types of weaknesses and pains. You've likely faced something to bring you down from being on top of the world. Maybe we can admit along with Paul one reason it happens. My sinful nature is quick to become proud. And God knows it, so he keeps me humble.

Notice, however, Paul doesn't blame God for this affliction. But he does understand God has the power to remove it. So, he prayed for the Lord to take away his affliction. You can imagine his prayer, "Lord, I just want to serve you. Take away this pain, this affliction, so that I can better serve you and others." A noble request!

But would Paul have been a better missionary if God took away his ailments? He gave Paul the answer, "*My grace is enough for you. For my power is perfected in weakness.*" You might pray, and pray, and pray that God would remove your suffering. One Christian prays, "Lord, if you could just take this living paycheck by paycheck situation out of the picture, I could really be a loving dad and also give more to my church." Another prays, "Lord, if you can take this cancer away, then I could better serve the Christian congregation you gave me." Still another, perhaps a Christian teacher or pastor prays, "Lord, if you can just turn the culture back to you, I would be able to teach these children your word free from insult and mockery." And maybe you've prayed, "Lord, take away this health struggle, and I can be a better Christian and not a burden to others." And maybe you're still waiting for God to answer that prayer.

Paul received an answer from God which fits in every Christian's life, "*My grace is enough for you. For my power is made perfect in weakness.*" God didn't need to take away Paul's suffering for Paul to be the best missionary he could be. God didn't need to remove all the setbacks for him to serve. God doesn't need to take away your suffering or your ailments for you to be the best Christian you can be. He doesn't need to keep your life free from struggles so that you might serve him.

Why? You already have all that you need! His grace. All you need to live and glorify God in your life is his grace, his gift in Christ. In fact, it is the very lowliness and afflictions you face that amplify his grace in your life. Your affliction magnifies your reliance on his working and his Word. Your suffering amplifies your faith and your reliance on God.

Paul isn't the only one who faced great suffering and had his prayer answered this way. There was another man who pleaded with the Lord to take away his cup of suffering. Three times he fell with his face to the ground and pleaded with the Father, "If it is possible, take this cup away. If it is possible, take this cup away. If it is possible, take this cup of suffering away." But each time he also prayed, "Your will be done."

He knew the Father's plan was indeed best. It was through his suffering and the road he faced that the glory of God was amplified. In his weakness he allowed the men who came to arrest him to bind him and take him away. In his lowliness he suffered insults and abandonment. He faced more than a thorn in his flesh, he faced many in a crown of mockery and nails driven through, piercing his flesh. In perfect humility he became the weakest of all and bled out on the cross.

But through that suffering and weakness he brought the greatest glory and accomplished the greatest service in God's kingdom. He was made perfect in weakness and accomplished our salvation. And rising from the dust he showed his power, rising to life. And he tells us, "*My grace, my gift of love, is sufficient for you.*" His weakness is our strength, our redemption, our life, our hope. And his strength and power carry us through every weakness until the glory ahead!

His grace caused Paul to boast not in the times he was strong, but the times he was weak. For then the power of Christ shelters over God's people. One possible analogy to this type of working is the controlled fire burns. To make the forest stronger the forest management team plans for a controlled burn. It might seem like a controlled burn is a big scare and terror as the smoke rises. It might cause part of the forest floor to look scorched and ruined. But what many don't consider is all the planning and work that goes into such a burn. The forest service considers the wind speed, the humidity, the slope and direction of the potential burn, and it considers the fuels in the area. It manages everything so that the conditions are just right, and the burn is going to accomplish what is good. The stronger trees rise above the flames and the forest emerges stronger, healthier, and new after the fire. The smoke dissipates and the controlled burn works out for good in the end. How much more doesn't the wisdom of God consider every factor of the afflictions, hardships, persecution, sickness, and setbacks we face so that they can only work for our good and the good of his plan? His controlled burns never fail. His wisdom and his grace are sufficient to carry us through the fires to strength and glory in the end. Trust his plan. Trust his wisdom. Trust his goodness. Trust the promised glory that awaits all who hope in him.

That is why Paul says he not only endures hardships and afflictions, but he will also boast in them and take delight in them. And that is why you, brothers and sisters, face the things you do even as a child of God. Boast gladly in your weaknesses so that Christ's power might rest upon you and shelter you. When your face is down in the dust in prayer, remember that you are going to be lifted from the dust to glory. When you are weak, then you are the strongest.

So why does God make his people face things from blindness, to illness, persecution, and even setbacks as small and frustrating as a rusted bolt on a car or toilet flush system? Couldn't he make us free from such weaknesses, hardships, and troubles? He will, someday. But until then his grace is sufficient, and our boasting will be only in him who became weak so that we might be strong in him.