

Hello Sixth Street Christian Friends!

I wrote the following meditation in preparation for the February board meeting, and I thought I'd share it here as well.

In Paul's second letter to the Corinthian church, chapter 12, verse 9, he writes, "but [the Lord] said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.' So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me."

In the previous verses, Paul wrote about the fact that he had been given this great revelation from God: that he had been caught up to the third heaven to hear words that were for his ears only. He must have felt on top of the world – quite literally! Yet then he wrote:

"Therefore, to keep me from being too elated, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me, to keep me from being too elated."

He asked God to make this "thorn" leave him. I wonder if he thought it was keeping him from being as effective as he could have been without it. Yet he said he had been "given" to him for the purpose of keeping him from being too elated – too excited, too happy. Was God the giver of this thorn? Why wouldn't God want Paul to feel elated? I think this part of his second letter to the Corinthian church is Paul's answer to that question.

Earlier in the chapter, Paul talks about how he, of all people, had reason to boast – after all, he had been chosen by God, swooped up to Paradise, and listened as the Lord spoke directly to him. Who wouldn't want to tell about that experience? But Paul also knew that to boast in that would make people concentrate on *him* and not God's message through him. I think that's why Paul thought he "was given" his thorny tormenter.

In the past, I have read this scripture and God's response to Paul asking for the thorn to be removed, and thought, why would God make Paul suffer in order to show the power of Christ? I wonder now if Paul was trying to figure out the same thing.

It's a common belief that all things happen according to the will of God which leads to the assumption that God causes all things to happen – including great suffering – for some higher purpose. I think Paul believed this very strongly and wrote to the Corinthian church about why he thought that would be. His answer was that the power of Christ could only be shown through weakness.

I think about it differently. As I read Paul telling of his suffering and weakness, I see a man frustrated by his limitations and questioning God. The first part of God's response to him was, "My grace is sufficient for you," and what I hear is this, "Your weakness will not stop what I am doing through you. You will do what you can, and it will be enough. My grace, through you, will be sufficient to my purpose."

As a person with many weaknesses, I hear love in these words. I am comforted to know that even though I am weak, and stumbling, and imperfect, that these will in no way stop what God will do through me. I will do what I can, and it will be enough. What better way to show the power of Christ?