



GROW. PRAY. SERVE.

This Weekend's Message: "Make Your Mess Your Message"

PRAYER: Almighty God, your grace is sufficient in all of life. Alleluia. Amen.

ICEBREAKER: Have you ever had a sharp physical pain? Describe it.

INTRODUCTION: In this next passage, Paul goes from the height of the heavens to the depth of pain as he describes his "thorn in the flesh." In 12:7, Paul subtly jabs the false teachers who claimed to be above him. His revelations were surpassingly great, but instead of dwelling on the greatness and in order to keep Paul from exalting himself, a thorn in the flesh was given to him. There is irony in the language that Paul uses. He contrasts being lifted up, or exalted, with being lowered down. The false teachers were exalting themselves above the Corinthians and above Paul. Paul, who had the authority given him from Christ, willingly allowed himself to be humbled, or lowered down so that the Corinthians would see the power of God at work in him.

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. In 12:1-6 Paul is both physically elevated and elevated in rank through the better vision. In 12:7-10 Paul is brought down once again by his suffering. In 12:7, Paul says that a thorn was given to him in order to keep him from exalting himself. Have you ever had an experience like that, share it with your group.
2. Paul calls the thorn a "messenger of Satan." Although Paul views it as a satanic attack, he recognizes that God gave the thorn to him and that ultimately Satan is under God's authority. Pause to consider that whatever happens to you happens in the context of divine authority, what painful experience might you be sharing now that is the handiwork of God.
3. Paul implored the Lord three times that the thorn might leave him. This evokes the image of Christ in the garden of Gethsemane as he prayed to his Father in the light of his impending suffering. This allusion serves to remind Paul's readers that the Christ in whom they believed, suffered greatly. It is through His suffering that they have life in Him. Consider how your suffering (past or present) might be a means of identification with Christ.
4. Paul reveals that he asked God to take the thorn, to take away his source of suffering, and in God's response we have one of the most often quoted verses in the Bible. God's response was, "my grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness" (12:9). Whatever Paul was facing, God had him there for a reason and He would be the one to continue working in and through Paul despite the fact that he was not the "perfect" mouthpiece. Consider how this applies to you and share it with the group.

CHALLENGE: We can cry out to God and we can be recipients of His grace and agents of His grace even though we do not receive relief from what might be plaguing us.

CHAMPION TIP: Remind your group that in God's kingdom, weakness is not synonymous with failure: it is the only way to succeed.