

Good morning 5th Avenue Family and Friends,

## God Loves to use broken vessels

This week's devotionals revolve around God's grace. In particular, how has God demonstrated grace in my life. The enormity of the answer is almost too much to put to paper. The evidence of his grace is all around me, but what stands out the most to me, is his loving acceptance of this broken vessel.

“For while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.”  
Romans 5:10

At a time when I gave God every reason to cast me aside, instead he saved me. I denied him and he gave me eternal life. When I was angriest with God, he offered me peace and salvation. God's grace amazes me. God's love and salvation are a gift given to us; it is never something we do for God. And that's the amazing thing, God's love and grace is undeserved. If we're honest with ourselves, why would God want any of us? What have I to offer the King

of Kings? On my best day, I sin continually – what can I do to deserve his gift of redemption?

“I've decided to accept Christ,” some would declare, as if we're doing something for God. It reverses the roles and diminishes God's gift of grace. And that's the point, if we make it about us instead of Jesus, we deny his sacrifice.

The marvelous thing about God's grace is his willingness to extend it to us, broken as we are. Have you ever felt as if you had no value? You are so precious to God that he gave his Son to redeem you. Who does that? Only God; because washed in Christ's blood, we are redeemed and justified and are heirs with him to the kingdom of heaven. God's grace is sufficient enough to cover all sinners.

I carry a small flat stone in my pocket that I call “enough.” It's there to always remind me that God's grace, God's love is enough. On my worst day, I am reminded that through Christ I have enough. Thank God for his grace, for his gift of a Savior and his unchanging love for all of us. Today, as you consider God's Word, as you believe in Christ Jesus, your Savior, your risen Lord, rejoice that you are at peace with God, that you are indeed, a redeemed child of God, and that God's grace is sufficient **“enough”** for you.

PRAYER - Almighty God, precious Lord and Savior, despite all of the challenges, all of the worries of this world, your grace is sufficient. Because of your love and grace, you sent your one and only Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Clothed in His righteousness, we dare to approach your throne of grace; forgiven and redeemed children of the Most-High. Heavenly Father, we cling to that promise of grace and forgiveness and praise your Holy Name. Amen and Amen.

Monday & Tuesday, 28 - 29 September 2020 – Dependent Living Is Powerful (2 Corinthians 12:1-21)

It seems like every day I discover new ways in which I am weak and in need. Whether it be sin, physical exhaustion or emotional dependence, I am constantly discovering my need for help. But daily I also discover a God who is absolutely sufficient in all the ways I am weak. Daily I receive renewal from my heavenly Father who seems to take these weaknesses of mine and use them for his kingdom.

Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 12:9, “But God said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.” What great comfort we can find in the words of Paul here. And what amazing love our heavenly Father has for us that he would bestow his sufficient grace upon us.

The Corinthians had been putting up with the teaching of deceivers, contrary the biblical truth that Paul taught them. The foolish teachers claimed to be God's leaders but were really masquerading. They didn't look evil, but their teaching and behavior exploited the Christians in Corinth, drawing them away from following Christ.

On the other hand, Paul chose to promote Christ, not himself. To counter the evil influence on those whom he loved so dearly, Paul is forced to talk about his own life choices and experiences, especially hardships. These are evidences of the Lord Jesus's commendation of his work and vindication of him as an apostle (2 Corinthians 10:18).

Many of those same challenges can happen to anyone, not just those being persecuted for their faith. And, in the midst of those messy and often painful circumstances, we also have a choice of whom to promote, ourselves or Christ. On whom will we rely at those times? It is in our weaknesses that He is the strongest. He uses many things to come to our rescue and to comfort us. Sometimes all we can do is to get into the basket provided for us, be quiet, and trust the One holding the rope. Whether weak or strong, living dependently on Christ is the best way to live.

#### Reflection Questions:

- In the midst of your most painful trial, how have you seen Jesus's grace be sufficient for you?
- How have you seen His power made complete in your weakness?
- When people mistake your love for something contrary to your true intentions, how do you tend to respond?

1. What grabbed your attention from these verses? 12:1-10; 12:11-18; 12:19-21

What verses or specific words do you want to understand better? What verses illustrate or help you understand what dependent living on God looks like?

Prayer: O Lord, feed your people with your grace, and deliver our souls from the death of sin. Fill us with your mercy, that we may be united with the joys of the righteous; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Wednesday, 30 September 2020 - Dependent Living Is Powerful (2 Corinthians 12:1-10)

We serve a God who turns our greatest weakness into our greatest strength. In his grace, all he asks of us is to have a heart open, willing and receptive to him. Our God is one who comes down to us and lays down his life that we might live through him. He's the King of Kings who washes the feet of humanity, who would betray him. He's the God of compassion who heals the sick and spends time with the sinners rather than the holy. He has given up any form of personal gain to devote his entire existence to paving the way for us to have restored relationship with our heavenly Father.

Paul shares his vision from Christ and what he learned from that experience.

- What happened 14 years before this letter was written (v. 2)?
- While in paradise (heaven), what did he hear (v. 4)?
- About what does he choose to boast (v. 5)?
- If he chooses to boast about that experience, he would not be a liar because it was true. Why does he refrain from boasting about that experience (v. 6)?
- In order to keep from being conceited, what happened (v. 7)?
- Three times, Paul did what (v. 8)?
- Write God's answer to him (v. 9) in the space below:
- What is Paul's response to God (v. 9)?
- Write Paul's choice of how to live his life (v. 10) in the space below:
- Did anything else grab your attention?

Looking at v. 6, we see that Paul preferred to be remembered for what he said and did in following Christ rather than for that one extraordinary experience that certainly contrasts with sneaking out of Damascus in a basket.

- Why did Paul share this experience with the Corinthians after keeping it private for 14 years? See also v. 11.
- What does Paul mean by calling it a “thorn in his flesh” (v. 7)?
- The Lord in His goodness allowed Satan to touch Paul’s body with this “thorn” (as in Job 2:10). For what purpose?
- How many times did he ask for it to be removed? (v.8)
- After Paul heard from Jesus, his tone changed from pleading with the Lord to remove the thorn to what entirely new response (vv. 9-10)?
- Why is Paul willing to delight in weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions and difficulties “for Christ’s sake?”

We love the sensational. We get excited for a miracle or a good vision or dream. We’re infatuated with celebrities. But do we have the same level of passion for daily faithfulness? It’s the consistent godly patterns of our lives that yield enduring fruit.

Prayer: May God the Father bless me. May God the Son protect me. May the power of the Holy Spirit enlighten me, and forgive all my sins. Amen.

Thursday & Friday, 1- 2 October 2020 2 - Dependent Living Is Powerful - Corinthians 12:1-10

We serve a God whose grace is wholly sufficient for us. In fact, it’s only in living by his grace that we are made strong. Your heavenly Father says, “My power is made perfect in weakness.” In Christ we can boast in our need; for our need is our greatest asset. Christ demonstrated through his ministry that he works powerfully when people simply acknowledge their need of him. From the woman desperate to touch his garment, to Zacchaeus the tax collector, to the paralyzed man lowered through the ceiling, God works incredible miracles in the lives of those who come before him with all their brokenness and need. His power is made perfect in those who simply cry out to him in desperation.

In contrast, we see those in Scripture who come before God thinking they have it all, and therefore receive nothing from him. Mark 10:17-27 tells us of a rich, young ruler who came to Jesus asking for his help but was unwilling to trade worldly success for eternal relationship. In response to the young man’s unwillingness Jesus says, “How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!” (Mark 10:23). I don’t believe Jesus was just talking about monetary wealth here, although money is most definitely included. I believe Jesus is making a statement about anyone who feels satisfied in themselves and the world apart from God. You can be poor and still receive nothing from God because you live pridefully without acknowledging your need. One of our greatest gifts is weakness because in acknowledging our weakness we make space for God to move and work. Those who are satisfied with worldly success, pleasure and possession make little room for the incredible wealth of love, peace, passion and joy God longs to give those who simply acknowledge their need of him.

God is attracted to weakness. He can’t resist those who humbly and honestly admit how desperately they need Him. Our weakness, in fact, makes room for His power.

- In what ways was Paul made strong in weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions and difficulties?
- What else did you learn as you studied 2 Corinthians 12:1-10?
- What could it look like, feel like, and sound like (the words we use) if we applied vv. 9-10 to our lives?
- In the midst of your most painful trial, how have you seen Christ’s words to be true, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness?”
- Have you been spending precious energy trying to solve or figure out “a thorn” in your life? If there doesn’t appear to be a clear answer or at least in the near future, take a moment to entrust it to the God who knows.
- In what other ways can you apply this lesson to your life?

Prayer: Jesus, bless what you have given, feed our souls with bread from heaven; guide and lead us all the way, in all that we may do and say. Amen.

Saturday, 3 October 2020 - Dependent Living Is Powerful - 2 Corinthians 12:11-21

You see, this life is not about possession whether it be little or much, it's about the posture of your heart towards God. The abundant life God longs to give you will only be received in areas where you acknowledge your weakness and need. It was the thief hanging on the cross, acknowledging his own sin who received the gift of eternal life, not the pious and successful high priest who, in his pride, fought to crucify the very Savior he had been asking to come.

Posture your heart today as all those who have received the incredible wealth of the Lord's love have before you. Ask the Spirit to show you your dependence and need of God if you don't already know it. Ask God to humble you and make you receptive to all he longs to give. May it be his grace that is sufficient for you today, rather than your own strength. May it be his power that proves strong in your weakness. And may you experience today all the sufficient grace your heavenly Father longs to give.

See how Paul picks up again on what he shared in 2 Corinthians 11:1-12

- I ought to have been \_\_\_\_\_ (v. 11) for I am not \_\_\_\_\_ even though I \_\_\_\_\_.
- What things mark an apostle that were done in Corinth (v. 12)?
- Why does Paul choose not to be a burden to them (v. 14)?
- Like parents do for their children, Paul says he will very gladly do what (v. 15)?
- What illogical question does he ask (v. 15)?
- What 3 questions did he ask them about himself and Titus (vv. 17-18)?
- Who does Paul say is a witness to his words (v. 19; 11:31)?
- What does he call them in v. 19? See also 7:1.
- Everything he does is for what purpose (v. 19)?
- What are his fears about visiting them (v. 20)?
- What Paul describes in v. 20 sounds like some family gatherings, especially around the holidays. Does it sound familiar to you?
- What also might happen when he visits them (v. 21)?
- In what had some of them been indulging (v. 21)?
- In what other ways can you apply this lesson to your life?
- Reasons why God wants us to depend on Him more than on ourselves (v.12:6)
- To refrain from boasting about personal spiritual experiences (v. 12:7-8)
- Enduring a thorn in the flesh that God chooses not to heal (v. 12:9)
- Trusting God's grace to be sufficient (v. 12:9)

Prayer: How I praise and thank You Father, that You are a God Who is mighty in strength and Who fully understands the frailties and fears that we face in our daily lives. And so, I come to You to ask for Your abundant grace and never-failing strength, so that I may face life's difficulties with confidence, knowing that Your grace is sufficient to deal with every eventuality, for Your strength is made perfect in our weaknesses. How I praise You that Your good purposes towards Your children never change. Thank You, that You have promised to finish a good work in me and to carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus, to Your praise and glory. Give me Your grace and Your strength I pray, to face all the issues I may encounter today, with a heart that is willing to pray, "Thy will not mine be done." Help me to be a living sacrifice unto You, which I know can only be achieved as I die to self-daily and live moment by moment for Christ, to Whom be all praise and glory, and in Whose name, I pray. Amen.

**BE JOYFUL ABOUT WEAKNESSES SO CHRIST'S POWER SHINES!**