

Keep me looking to Jesus moment by moment and grant me wisdom, guidance and grace in the daily decisions I may be called upon to make today, for I understand more and more that every one of my steps needs to be guided by You. Thank You that Your grace is sufficient for all my needs and necessities, and may I walk in the paths of righteousness all the days of my life, to Your praise and glory. This I humbly ask in Jesus' name.

One of my favorite parts of Scripture comes from Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians Chapter 12. Paul tells us that he has a thorn in his flesh that he has begged God to remove. But despite his relenting prayer, the thorn remains. But then suddenly Paul flips the script on us and tells us that he is grateful for that thorn because he has realized that in his weakness, he has found true strength, in his own weakness he is strong because he has to rely on God.

There are a lot of frustrations right now. Rise in positive COVID-19 cases, all forms of schooling still having challenges, can't see families, have lost family and friends, facing employment uncertainty, concerned about the health of family members, worrying if we will be able to find what we need at stores, and of course wondering whether the next time we go out might be when we encounter someone with the virus. Sisters and Brothers, I'm not alone in these feelings or disappointments. We are frustrated because we are not in control. We are frustrated because we want our expectations of our celebrations, our vacations, and our lives to go back to "normal." We are frustrated because this climate of social injustice, hunger, homelessness, political chaos, spiritual and mental fatigue was not a part of our plan, because we are facing uncertainty and insecurity.

I know my gut instinct in times like these is to say, "Why me God? Of all the people in the world, why did you have to do this to me?" But when I take a really hard look in the mirror, I realize God isn't doing this to me, God didn't cause this, He isn't punishing me. God doesn't want me to hurt or to suffer. But what I am reminded of again and again when I can put my frustration aside and turn to God, is that no matter my circumstance, God can take the greatest tragedy and bring beauty from it. That amidst all the frustration and my desire to be in control of my life, God's got this and He's got me. I may have had plans for renewal vacation, celebrating the 90th birthdays of Uncle Mike and Uncle Jimmie (Martin and my respective uncles) and attending a Dallas Cowboy football game, visiting with my family and friends in Georgia – maybe next year? But God has taken my time in quarantine and He has given me something far greater and fulfilling. Our son, Nicolas returning home; Sophia new career in public health and completing her MPH; Biancha completing her Mechanical Engineering degree, getting married to Robert and oh yes, my stupendous blessing, becoming Nonna (Italian name for grandmother).

For when I put my trust in God, when I focus on Him and rely on Him rather than my own abilities and understanding, that is when I gain true strength. I know there will be beauty beyond my frustrations. And in those moments that I feel most overwhelmed I can be reminded that Paul too asked for the thorn to be removed. But Paul found peace and fulfillment when He turned that thorn over to God and listened for His will in adversity.

It is because **SOMEBODY LOVES ME**, that we are given an amazing gift – GRACE. Grace is a gift most of us don't know how to receive. We've been so inundated with the earthly systems of give-and-get and work-and-earn that grace is a concept few ever fully grasp. Yet it's grace alone that has the power to transform our lives. Grace alone has the power to bring freedom to the captives. By grace alone we are saved.

This GRACE, in my humble opinion, ought to cause each believer to shout! The knowledge that His grace is sufficient, provides us with the assurance that all we need is given to us by the grace of God. There is no want that His grace has not made provision for. No matter what hard times, sickness, trouble or sin we may be going through, His grace remains adequate. The hymn writer wrote "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me." Sometimes we suffer from amnesia and forget His sufficiency, particularly when we are going through. II Corinthians 12:9 is our reference today.

"Each time He said, 'My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness.'" So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me."

In this familiar passage, Paul indicates that the Lord did not grant his requests. Three times, he earnestly prayed, asking God to release him from his hampering, trying trouble. Paul had a thorn in his flesh. We do not know the physical ailment, but we know that it was painful and crippling. He writes that it was given to him. The Lord answered him and assured him that His grace was sufficient and that God's power was made perfect in his weakness. Paul's weakness would become a place of God's power. Never interpret God's "No" as denial. His grace may be delayed, but rest assured that it will come according to God's time and with power. Thank God for those who have experienced His grace. I know I'm not alone for everyday people receive His sufficient grace to meet their every need.

Question, wouldn't it be so much more comfortable if God would keep us in our "strength zone?" But God keeps thrusting us into our "weakness zone" because it is only in our weakness that He is made strong. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong. — 2 Corinthians 12:9-10

God is never limited by our limitations. Whenever He calls us to step out of our comfort zone and into the exchange zone, it is because He wants to do something in and through our lives. Has God thrust you back into your weakness zone? Are you willing to trust that He has the strength for your situation? Don't be of little faith!

Human strength is a fragile illusion. It often fails when we encounter difficult circumstances. Suddenly, out of the blue, life can fall apart. An accident. A grim diagnosis. The loss of a job. Calamity. Betrayal. Relationship breakdown. These are the times when we see how weak we really are. The porcelain is fragile. The slogans on our T-shirts may advertise that we have Girl or Boy Power, or that we are Pretty Smart. Pretty Tough. Pretty Awesome. Pretty Fierce or that Strong Looks Good on Me. But deep down, we know it's not true. Our own strength is woefully inadequate. The slogans are hollow. No amount of personal empowerment can silence the nagging realization that we don't have what it takes. We just don't. Our strength and our sense of control are only figments of our imagination, illusions that disappear as quickly as a vapor in a puff of wind.

We tend to think of weakness and strength as opposites. To be strong is a positive trait; it means to be without weakness. To be weak is a negative trait; it means to be without strength. But the Bible doesn't adhere to this definition. It redraws the lines. Scripture teaches that everyone who relies on God is strong and that everyone who relies on self is weak. Contrary to what the world tells us, strength does not depend on a person's competence. No. The biblical prescription is simple and radical. God-reliance equals strength. Self-reliance equals weakness. Period. Your personal ability or inability doesn't indicate whether you are weak or strong; your dependence on God does. A strong person is "strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might" (Ephesians 6:10).

Your personal ability or inability doesn't indicate whether you are weak or strong; your dependence on God does. We are strong whenever we depend on God. When we depend on Him, He works powerfully through our strengths and our weaknesses. Our strengths put God's strength on display. But guess what? Our weaknesses also put God's strength on display. You can be a strong person regardless of what mix of strengths and weaknesses you bring to the table. Are you strong and gifted? Great! Understand that everything you have comes from God and rely on Him for the wisdom and strength to use your talents for his glory. Do you feel weak and incapable? That's great too! Because your inability is the perfect showcase for God's ability. It gives Him the opportunity to prove how powerful and strong He is.

The Apostle Paul was irritated by a personal weakness he called his "thorn in the flesh" (2 Corinthians 12:7). We don't know exactly what this weakness was, but we do know that Paul felt harassed and tormented by it. Three times he pleaded with God to take it away. The Lord told him, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." 2 Corinthians 12:9 As a result of this answer, Paul stopped asking the Lord to get rid of it. Instead, he embraced his weakness and began to view it as an opportunity for God to showcase His divine strength. Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong. — 2 Corinthians 12:9-10

The right kind of strong is “made perfect in weakness.” In other words, weakness presents the perfect occasion — the clearest, most obvious opportunity—to showcase God’s power. God’s ability shines with spectacular brilliance when it is etched against the backdrop of human inability. God works through every human ability that is surrendered to him. But working through weakness proves that He can also work in the absence of any ability whatsoever on our part. Where it is especially obvious that we didn’t have the capacity to prevail, He gets the greater glory. That’s why God’s strength is made perfect in weakness.

I don’t know about you, but I take great comfort in the fact that I don’t need to be strong. It’s okay to be weak. In fact, my weakness gives God the perfect opportunity to show me that He doesn’t need my strength or ability. He just needs me to lean on him. And He’ll do the rest. **SOMEBODY LOVES YOU!**

Folks, this is the kind of grace that cannot be measured. God’s grace has no limits. His favor has no boundaries. His love has no borders. There is no compromise in God. God’s grace is ours without asking for it. Everywhere we go, everything we do, every relationship, and every activity is covered by God’s grace. When things are going haywire in your life, it’s grace that keeps you from losing your mind. When financial problems seem to persist in your life, it’s God’s immeasurable grace that keeps you from going under.

When your health fails and you can’t get well, it’s grace that keeps you in perfect peace and restores your soul. This grace allows you to walk through the valley of the shadow of death without fearing evil. When your loved one dies and you think you can’t live without him, it’s God’s grace that sustains you and keeps you on your feet. When you’ve lost your job and can’t seem to find one that can support your lifestyle, it’s God’s grace that puts someone or some business on your mind and gives you the plan to succeed.

When your relationships are in an upheaval and your communication is faulty, it’s God who shows you how to conquer that situation. When your church is reeling from hurt and shame, it’s God’s grace that picks you up and turns things around and puts your feet on solid ground. In the face of wars and rumors of wars and people you care about are fighting on foreign fields, it’s God’s grace that stabilizes you and builds you up for the task of waiting. When you’ve made an unthinkable mistake and everyone else seems to set you aside, it’s God’s immeasurable grace that speaks forgiveness into your spirit and revives you again. Look at every situation in life that you can think of and view the immeasurable grace of God towering over us all.

Who would not long to live in eternity with a Savior and Redeemer whose love is so overwhelming, mercy so far-reaching, and favor so accommodating that they would give up their personal agenda to satisfy God’s? Our personal agenda as we work for the kingdom of God is not to satisfy ourselves with gladness and boasting about what we are doing for God, but to glory in the cross of Jesus, develop a meaningful relationship with Him, and give Him all glory and majesty for everything, every act, every deed, every work we are doing. We are anointed to serve the Lord with gladness, never serving ourselves because of His immeasurable grace. Oh yes, **SOMEBODY LOVES YOU!**

It’s all about You, Lord. Help us to know that it’s not about us! The Kingdom of God is Your kingdom, and we have inherited from You our positions in Your kingdom. Thank You for allowing us to live with You forever while totally submitting to You while on this earth – solely because – **NOT JUST SOMEBODY, but YOU dear GOD, LOVES ME. Amen.**

