

LESSON 1

HIS GRACE IS SUFFICIENT

*“Fear not, I am with thee, O be not dismayed,
for I am thy God, and will still give thee aid
I’ll strengthen thee, help thee, and cause thee to stand
Upheld by my righteous, omnipotent hand”*

*“When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie
My grace, all sufficient, shall be thy supply
The flame shall not hurt thee; I only design
thy dross to consume, and thy gold to refine”*

From his first moments as a Christian, the apostle Paul was called to suffer. Even while his eyes were still burning from the divine encounter that disrupted his malicious plans in Damascus, the Lord declared that “I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name” (Acts 9:16).

And suffer he did. Paul’s Job seasons included beatings, stoning, shipwrecks, betrayal, persecution, imprisonment, and various other threats and dangers (2 Cor. 11). The apostle was also afflicted with some kind of “thorn in the flesh,” and while we do not know for sure what that meant, the “thorn” was debilitating enough that Paul repeatedly begged for God to take it away. The apostle was asking for relief, which God surely could have granted in an instant, but what he was given was much

greater. Instead of removing this seeming hindrance, the Lord told Paul, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor. 12:9).

God gave these words to Paul, but He surely directs them to all of His children. At every point in life, this verse is a precious truth for followers of Jesus to cling to. On our best of days, we are in desperate need of His grace, presence, and power. But during times when we are facing any degree of suffering, these words are a candle in the darkness, a rock to stand on, a life raft to cling to, a shield to hold up against the fiery arrows of hopelessness and despair. *His grace is sufficient for you. The power that upholds the universe is with you and working on your behalf.*

This verse is both a proclamation and a promise. God is proclaiming to Paul, and to all who are in Christ, that His domain extends over every corner of creation and every element of nature. Our fleshly thorns are not beyond the control of His purposes and presence, but rather our weakness shines a spotlight on His power and our need for it. And 2 Corinthians 12:9 is a promise that our Lord is with us during every difficult moment. Knowing that He saved us and He cares for us is what we need the most to endure whatever we are facing.

During our Job season, these truths were a source of life and hope. When everything around us seemed to be crumbling, we could be sure that God’s grace would hold firm. When plans were failing, we knew that God’s grace could not fail. When it seemed like we had lost so much, we could hold fast to the certainty that we would never lose His grace or be deprived of His love. Even

though there was much that seemed uncertain and unclear, we could be certain that “neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:38).

These realities are not *more* true during seasons of suffering, but we tend to become more acutely aware of them. The late counselor David Powlison noted, “Peter says that you are ‘grieved by various trials’ (1 Pet. 1:6). But in Christ you have been given something imperishable. God promises to guard you by his power and to make your faith more genuine and true as you pass through fire.”³

Indeed, as we naturally seek to understand the reasons for our suffering, we can be confident that at least part of the purpose is to remind us of our frailty and to push us to a deeper trust in our sovereign Lord. As C. S. Lewis told a woman who was struggling with an unfaithful husband, “God, who foresaw your tribulation, has specially armed you to go through it, not without pain but without stain. . . . The thing is to rely only on God. The time will come when you will regard all this misery as a small price to pay for having been brought to the dependence.”⁴

In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul did not find the promise of God’s grace as merely a reason to resist despair. He went even further and said, “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 Cor. 12:9–10). As in his other letters, Paul saw God’s hand at work even in his weakness—especially in his weakness.

How can we be strong when we are at our weakest? Because in those times, we are forced to remember that *all* of our strength comes from “my helper” and “the upholder of my life” (Ps. 54:4). As Charles Spurgeon once preached,

I am sure, my dear fellow servants, life will break you down . . . unless you learn the habit of leaning on Jesus. Be not afraid to lean too much. There was never yet a saint blamed for possessing too much faith; there was never such a thing known as a child of God who was scolded by the Divine Father for having placed too implicit reliance upon his promise. The Lord has said, “As thy day thy strength shall be.” He has promised, “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.” He has told you that the birds of the air neither sow nor reap, nor gather into barns, and yet are fed. He has assured you that the lilies of the field toil not, neither do they spin, and yet your heavenly Father makes them more beautiful than Solomon in all his glory. Why do you not cast your care on him who cares for ravens and for flowers of the field? Why are you not assured that he will also care for you?⁵

In another sermon, Spurgeon added, “You need Jesus; and if you get Jesus, you never shall have a want that is outside of Christ, you shall never have a necessity that is not comprised within the matchless circle of his unspeakable all-sufficiency.”⁶

All we need is Christ. And the deeper our trials, the more we recognize that all we have is Christ. He is enough—much more than enough.

