

THE WAITING ROOM

Title: Part 2 – “Given a Gift”

Date: July 19, 2026

While everyone in the house is saying “Hi,” as always we say “Hi” to our online family. We want you to know we are FOR you so let us know how we can pray for you or serve you this week. AND if this message blesses you, would consider sharing it with a friend or family member.

If you have your Bible or the Bible app, we are going to be in **2 Corinthians 12** today. That's near the back half of your Bible if you are new to this. If you don't have access to a Bible, no worries, we will put everything on the screens. I want to read our main text in its entirety and then I'll show you where we are going today. 2 Corinthians 12, starting in verse 7. Paul is writing to a church he loves, and he says this:

Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. ⁸ Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. ⁹ But he 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 about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. ¹⁰ 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.

Come on... anyone in the house feeling a little weak today? I can’t wait to unpack what God has in store for us today, BUT a quick reminder of where we are to get us back in the flow.

We kicked off a new collection of messages last week called “The Waiting Room” and the question we are wrestling with for five weeks is one of the hardest questions any of us ever have to face whether you are a person of faith or not. The question is: **what do you do when there is nothing you can do but wait?**

AND as we waded into this last week, we landed on a phrase I want us to memorize together over the next few weeks. Say this with me:

Even now, God is not absent; He is present. He is not apathetic; He is attentive. He is not angry; He is filled with affection for me.

One more time...

That is what your soul has to say back to itself when your circumstances are screaming the opposite. Amen? When the diagnosis comes. When the phone rings in the middle of the night. When the door slams. When the silence stretches on. When you don't know what to do next. Even now...

Today I want to preach a message I am calling:

"Given a Gift"

AND up front I want to be sensitive, especially if you're new to church or you're just kicking the tires on this whole faith thing. Some of what I'm about to say today might make you a little uncomfortable. It might make some of you fold your arms and tempt you to check out. I get that. But I want you to hear me on this: if we're going to talk about waiting on God honestly then we have to be willing to talk about the wait that never ends. The thing that doesn't go away. The prayer that doesn't get answered. BUT if you'll stay with me for the next 30 minutes—this might be the most honest message on this topic you have ever heard.

Alright, so what do you do when there is nothing you can do but wait? Last week we sat in the waiting room at the doctor's office. Anyone get anxious just mentioning that? This week I want to take you into a different waiting room. The auto repair shop.

You know the one. Some of you can see it right now. Broken down chairs from 1997. That one small TV in the corner playing HGTV on mute. There's a Keurig that's been broken since the Obama administration. Coffee that tastes like it was brewed during the Bush administration. And you are in there because your car has been making a "NOISE." You know the noise. The noise you tried to turn the radio up over for three weeks hoping it would fix itself. The service guy in the polo shirt has you sign your initials on 4 different spots and says, "We'll take a look at it. Have a seat."

And so, you sit there. And you sit there. And you sit there thumbing through Motor Trend magazines from 5 years ago, trying not to think about it. Trying not to Google what the noise might mean because Google is going to tell you it's the transmission and you need to sell the car and move on with your life. And every time that door opens, you look up like a Labrador retriever, hoping it's your guy, and it's never your guy. It's somebody else's guy. And you sit back down. And you check your phone. And a full two hours goes by.

And then, FINALLY, your guy comes out with a clipboard. And you can tell from his face before he even opens his mouth, that is not a small-number face. That is a "I hate to be the guy that tells you this" face. And he starts using words like "timing chain" and "torque converter" and "transfer case", and you are just nodding along like you have any idea what he's talking about. And then he flips the clipboard around, and there it is. Almost \$10,000! Anyone know what I'm talking about?

And here's the thing about the repair shop waiting room. You are not sitting there because you are scared of THEM. You are sitting there because you are scared of the NUMBER. You are scared of what they are about to tell you it's going to cost. Because whatever that number is, you didn't get to pick it. Somebody else, in a room you couldn't see, is going to walk out here and hand you a piece of paper and you are just supposed to sign it. That's the deal. That's the arrangement. You brought the car in. You don't leave without paying whatever they decided.

AND that illustrates something we need to understand:

Some things in life come with a price tag you don't get to negotiate.

That's what today is about.

Because there are seasons in your life when God will allow something into your world that you would never have chosen. Something painful. Something humiliating. Something debilitating. Something that keeps coming back. And in that season, you have two choices. You can fight it, or you can receive it. You can resent it, or you can receive it. You can spend the rest of your life trying to get out from under it, or you can look up at your Heavenly Father and say, "If this is what you have chosen for me, I am going to receive it as a GIFT."

I told you today was gonna be uncomfortable.

But there's a man in the Bible who did exactly that. And thankfully for us, he wrote about it. And even crazier is it has been preserved for 2,000 years. AND what this guy he wrote is going to give us three things today that we can carry back with us into our own waiting rooms. So, here we go, jot this down. Here is the first thing:

1. Receive what you'd return.

Everyone say "receive" now say "what you'd return." Receive what you'd return.

In our text today, the Apostle Paul is writing to the church in Corinth. This section of his letter is the climax of his defense of being an Apostle of Christ and he goes very personal. Look at verse 7 with me again. Paul says:

Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was GIVEN a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me.

Circle that word "given" if you have a print Bible or highlight it on the Bible app. That is very interesting word choice, right?

In Greek—the language of most of the New Testament—the word is the same as the word for present. Like a gift under the Christmas tree. That is the word Paul chose. And here's the crazy part, Paul chose this word ON PURPOSE. Paul was one of the most educated writers of his day. He is not sloppy with vocabulary. He could have said “cursed with.” OR “stuck with.” He could have said “punished by.” BUT instead he picked “given,” as in given a gift.

WHY? Why would Paul say a messenger of Satan was given as a gift? The only possible answer is that in Paul's mind, whatever this thing was, we never actually learn what his “thorn” was, but in his mind it came from the hand of his Heavenly Father AND it came with a purpose.

AND he literally tells us the purpose in this verse. He says it was given in order to keep me from becoming conceited.

See, Paul had just spent the first six verses of chapter 12 talking about being caught up into the third heaven, seeing visions no one else had seen. He's the pastor everybody wants to hear at the conference. He's the guy everyone wants to book for their podcast. And from Paul's perspective, God knew that if Paul kept walking through that kind of spiritual altitude he was going to become an egomaniac. So, God let something into Paul's life that would keep him low to the ground. Something to keep him humble.

Paul called it a “thorn.” BUT the literal word doesn't mean a little splinter you get in your finger on a hike. It's a bigger word than that. It can mean a pointed stake—the kind of thing you'd get impaled on. Paul is being dramatic on purpose. He's saying, “this thing feels like I've been run right through.”

And then he says it was a “messenger of Satan, to torment me.” AND no, Paul was not married, so that's not his mother-in-law he's talking about. The word literally means “to strike someone with a closed fist... to beat someone.” AND get this, the word is only used 5 times in the New Testament. AND two of those 5 times are the words Matthew and Mark used to describe what they did to Jesus before crucifying Him!

That means when you sit down in the middle of the night with whatever is beating you up—the diagnosis, the loss, the thing that won't go away—you are not sitting there with a Savior who has never felt what you feel. Hebrews 4:15 says we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses. Jesus knows what your thorn feels like because His face knew what a fist felt like!

SO, Paul is telling us this thing didn't just sit there. This thing hit him over and over. Not once. Not twice. This was a repeated beatdown that was making his life difficult.

People have guessed for two thousand years what it was. Some think it was epilepsy—that Paul would collapse in the middle of preaching, and they thought he was possessed. Some think it was a chronic eye disease, because in Galatians he mentions people would have plucked out their eyes for him and given him theirs. Some think it was recurring malaria from all his travels. Some think it was severe depression, and honestly, if you read the book of Acts and see what Paul went through, depression would make perfect sense. We don't know exactly what it was. But we know four things about it:

- **It was painful.**

Like a stake or getting beat in the face.

- **It was humiliating.**

Which is why he doesn't even name it.

- **It was debilitating.**

It was getting in the way of the very thing God had called him to do.

And here's a fourth one... Look at what happens over the next verses. God tells Paul it's not going anywhere. Which means:

- **It was permanent.**

Permanent is not a word we like to associate with pain, is it? We are OK with a season. We are OK with a valley. We are OK with a chapter. But PERMANENT? Some of you have been praying about something for ten years, twenty years, thirty years, and you don't want to entertain the possibility that this might be a lifetime companion.

AND I understand that. Believe me, I get it! But Paul reminds us today that sometimes it is. Sometimes the thorn stays. Sometimes the loss doesn't get replaced. Sometimes the child doesn't come home. Sometimes the marriage doesn't get restored. Sometimes the diagnosis doesn't reverse. And what Paul is telling us today is that even when it's permanent, **it can still be a gift with a purpose.** Amen?

Because the alternative, the alternative is what most of us live with. Which is that we spend our whole lives fighting a thing that God has allowed, and we call it faith. But Paul is showing us another way. Paul is saying, "I was GIVEN a thorn." I was given it. It was handed to me. Somebody who loves me decided this was going to be part of my story. And if you can get to that place, if you can even crack the door on that idea, the whole picture starts to change.

Sometimes you have to receive what you'd return. BUT before Paul gets there, he does what any of us would do. He fights. So, number 2:

2. Take the “no” as a gift.

John Eldredge once said, “If you are only open to hearing one answer from God, it's not likely you will hear anything at all. More sadly, if you do hear a yes, you won't be able to trust it.” Meaning sometimes we have to be willing to accept God's “no” to our prayers. Look at how this went down for Paul in verse 8:

⁸ Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me.

When Paul says “three times,” he doesn't mean, I mentioned it three times in my prayers like, “Hey God, thanks for lunch, and by the way, if you could deal with that thorn thing...” No, the word he uses is *parakaleō* {*par-uh-kah-LEH-oh*} Everyone say *parakaleō*. It means to beg, to appeal, to call out with everything you've got. Three times he did this. Three periods of his life where he was on his face begging God. Fasting. Crying. Bargaining. “God, if you'll take this away, I'll start serving in kids. I'll give more. I'll never touch that stuff again. I promise!” Paul did that. Three times.

AND this is the guy who wrote most of our New Testament. This is the guy who went to heaven and came back and saw visions and things no one had seen. This is the guy who planted churches all over the Mediterranean. This guy had more spiritual credentials than any of us will ever have. And when he begged, God said no.

That's important. Because some of you have been told—maybe by a well-meaning Christian, maybe by a book, maybe by a YouTube preacher with really nice teeth—that the reason you haven't gotten your breakthrough is because you don't have enough faith. If you would just believe HARDER. If you would just DECLARE it. If you would just NAME IT and CLAIM IT. Then God would give you what you're asking for. AND if He hasn't, it must be your fault.

Listen to me. That is bad theology. That is an incorrect way to read the Bible. Because if that were true, the Apostle Paul would have gotten what he asked for. And he didn't!

The truth is **faith is not a vending machine**. You don't put your quarters of prayer in and pull the right lever and get the answer you wanted. That's not how any of this works.

BUT look what God ***DID*** say. Verse 9 now:

⁹ But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”

Now, first—can we just pause and acknowledge how much some of us needed to hear that God said SOMETHING? Because for some of you, silence has been the hardest part. You'd almost take a no if you could just get any word from Heaven at all. Paul begged. And on the third season, God spoke. He didn't say what Paul wanted to hear—but He said something.

AND look at what He said. “My grace is sufficient for you.” The word “sufficient” is in the present tense. Which means it's not “my grace WILL BE sufficient someday when you get to Heaven.” It means “my grace IS sufficient. Right now. In the middle of the beating you are taking from that thorn.

Grace, in this context, is simply the ability to put one foot in front of the other. It's the ability to get up tomorrow. It's the strength to come home to a house where nothing has changed. It's the courage to sit at the same dinner table with the same empty chair. It's not a rescue. It's a sustaining. God says, “I'm not going to take you out of it. I'm going to walk you through it. And every step you take, my grace will be right there under your foot.”

And then look at the second half of that verse: “My power is made perfect in weakness.” You know what that means? It means God's power doesn't reach its full glory in your strength. God's power reaches its full glory in your weakness. It's what Tim Keller said in his book “Walking with God through Pain and Suffering” as he was in the middle of his own cancer diagnosis. He wrote:

“I could wish not to have suffered, but I could not wish to be the person I was before suffering.”

Come on! That's a Christian who has been in the waiting room. That's a man who was in a season he never would have chosen but he wouldn't have traded who it made him for anything!

AND you may never have chosen this, this thorn in your flesh. But you don't yet know who you are going to become on the other side of it, either! Amen?

That takes us to this:

3. Boast in what you'd hide.

This is where Paul goes somewhere none of us naturally want to go. Look at verse 9 and 10:

⁹ But he 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 about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. ¹⁰ 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.

You know what I'd like to boast about? My strengths. My wins. My best moments. That highlight reel when everything was clicking. That's how our world works, right? That's literally 99.9% of all social media.

BUT not Paul. Paul says, “I am going to BOAST about the thing I would normally HIDE.” I am going to make my weakness the platform. I am going to stop pretending. I am going to stop covering. I am going to stop hiding. Because if this is what God has chosen for me, then this is exactly where His power is going to show up!

This is one of the deepest truths in this whole passage, so write down, take a screen shot, text it to yourself... BUT:

Embracing your inability is a prerequisite to experiencing Christ's ability.

Read with me... Embracing your inability is a prerequisite to experiencing Christ's ability.

As long as you are pretending you are FINE, God can't be your strength. As long as you are pretending you have it all TOGETHER, God can't hold you together. As long as you are pretending you don't NEED Him—you're going to keep white-knuckling a life that's slowly draining every ounce of joy out of you. Amen?

BUT the moment you take a breath and say, “God, I cannot carry this by myself!” That is the moment His power begins to rest on you. That is the moment somebody looks at you and goes, “How are you still standing?” AND you get to say, “I'm not, actually. He is!”

I dig into this more in my last book “Unshakeable”, but Psychologists have this whole field of study called “post-traumatic growth.” And what they've discovered, way back in the 90's, was they found a significant portion of people who go through the worst experiences of their lives don't just RECOVER from them. They actually come out on the other side changed for the BETTER. Things like a deeper appreciation of life, stronger relationships, greater resilience, a more meaningful spiritual life... Not because the suffering was good, but because something about walking through it produced something in them that could not have been produced any other way.

In other words, **what the gym does for your body. Suffering does that for your soul!** Paul figured that out 2,000 years ago. That there is a version of you that only exists on the other side of the wait. AND you don't get to skip the wait to get to that person.

Someone needs to hear this today. **Your wait is not a waste!** Amen? Your wait is not a waste!

You are not just wasting away in this season. Something is being FORMED in you! Because God is not absent. He's not apathetic. He's not angry. NO! He is present, even now! He is attentive, even now! He is filled with affection for you, even now! AND He is up to something in the waiting room that is going to make you the kind of person He can use in the throne room one day!

- Receive what you'd return.
- Take the "no" as a gift.
- Boast in what you'd hide.

I know for some of you this whole idea might still sound crazy though. Receiving pain as a "gift" doesn't seem healthy... is this like a normal Christian thing or am I in some kind of fringe church?

As we bring this to a close, let me show you where this comes from. It doesn't start with Paul. It starts with Jesus. Flip or thumb over to Luke 22, verse 41. This is the night before the cross. Jesus is in a garden called Gethsemane, and Luke says this:

⁴¹ He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, ⁴² "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done."

Look at this carefully. Jesus is holding a cup—metaphorically speaking. The cup of the cross. The cup of every sin that has ever been committed. The cup of God's wrath waiting to be poured out. The cup of death. And He's about to drink it for you and me. He cries out to His Father in heaven and says, "If you are willing, take this cup from me." Jesus is praying a real prayer for things to go a different way. He is asking for the thorn to be removed. He is asking for the plan to change.

AND the Father said no. But watch how His prayer ends. "Yet not my will, but yours be done."

Jesus received the cup as a gift. He didn't want it. He begged for it to pass. The price tag was steep. But when the Father said no, He received what He was given as a gift

with a purpose. AND every single one of us who has begged God for salvation for our souls is here today in grace because His Father said NO. If the Father had said yes and taken the cup, we'd have no cross. And if we have no cross, we have no salvation. And if we have no salvation, we are still in our sin.

My point is, the greatest gift God ever gave the humanity came in the form of a “no.”

And I don't say that flippantly. I don't say that from the top of some mountain looking down at your pain. I say it because I've watched it. I've sat across from people over the years who have walked through the worst thing you can imagine, and somewhere on the other side of it they have looked me in the eye and said, “I would not have chosen this. But I would not trade what God did in me through it for anything.” In fact, I have never—in twenty-five years of ministry—sat across from a believer who received their thorn as a gift and walked away regretting it. The people who regret their season are the ones who spent the whole season fighting it as if something was broken about their faith.

So, hear me. If you are sitting in a waiting room this morning, and you have been begging God for something, and the answer has been silence or a “no” or a “not yet...” I want to invite you to consider something. Would you be willing to entertain the possibility that what you're waiting through is not a curse, but a gift with a purpose you can't see yet, and a promise that you can trust?

The purpose is still hidden. But the promise is spoken. **My grace is sufficient for YOU.** Right now. In this room. In this chair. In your car. In your kitchen. It is sufficient. Would you be willing to consider that?

Some of you have been fighting this thing for so long you don't even remember what it was like before the fight. Today, I want to invite you to lay it down. Not lay down your faith. Lay down the fight. Say to your Heavenly Father, “If this is what You have chosen for me, I will receive it as a gift with a purpose and a promise. Not my will, but Yours be done.”

Because even now, God is not absent, He is present. He is not apathetic, He is attentive. And He is not angry, no He is filled with affection for you.

Let me pray for you.

[PRAYER TIME]