

A graphic on a dark green background. The word 'BUILT' is in small, white, uppercase letters at the top. Below it, the word 'UP' is written in large, light green, outlined letters. A blue arrow points upwards from the 'U' to the 'P'. Overlaid on the 'UP' is the phrase 'through suffering?!' in a white, cursive font.

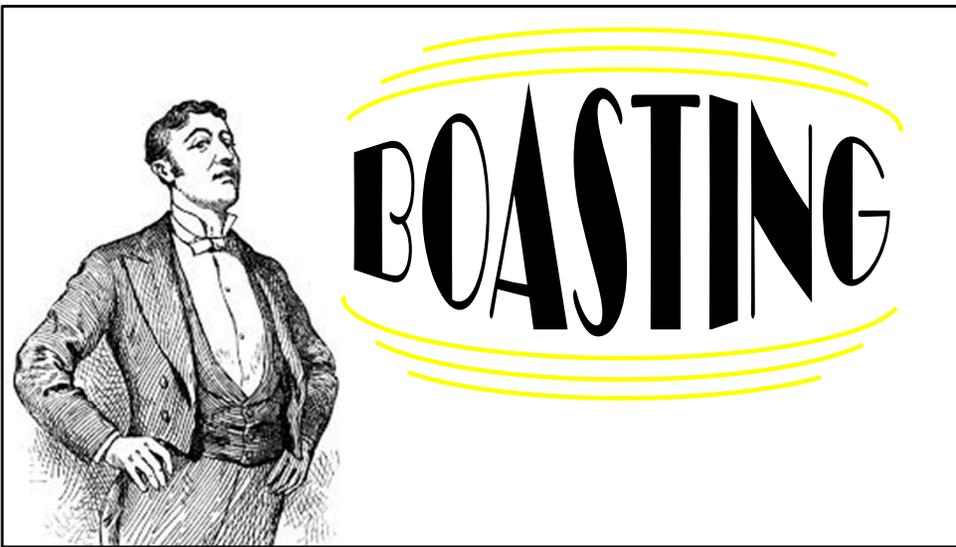
His Grace is Sufficient!
2 Corinthians 11:16 – 12:10

1

(Theme slide for this message)

In this time of uncertainty with the virus situation, our souls need the strength that comes from knowing that God's grace is and will be sufficient to see us through.

TR: But having that assurance doesn't mean that Christians should be arrogant and boastful.



2

God's posture for us is not to pretend that these days aren't a bit scary and confusing.

-- Most of us realize that the "hands on the hips" and "nose in the air" posture of bragging about ourselves and our ability to deal with whatever comes isn't reality the kind of security God wants us to have.

TR: Others have said things like . . .

**Confidence is silent.
Insecurities are loud.**

READ SLIDE

-- Puffing out our chests and then letting all the hot air blast forth in braggicado is not the Lord's intention for us.

TR: When we hear people presenting their letters of reference in the form of their accomplishments or acquaintances or what they've been through, we think . . .

**Boasting is always
an advertisement
of poverty.**

4

. . . how poor they really are, don't we?

-- But, if boasting about ourselves is not the same as having a deep security in our identity in Christ . . .

-- . . . What part does boasting play in the life of the Christian?

-- Especially in the midst of hard circumstances?

TR: You see, there is a good kind of boasting, like the prophet Jeremiah wrote about some 600 years before Christ.

Jeremiah 9:23-24

Thus says the LORD: "Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, ²⁴but **let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me**, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD."

ESV

5

READ SLIDE

-- The question today is how can appropriate boasting truly boost us, that is, build us up?

TR: The refrain of the apostle Paul in both 1 and 2 Corinthians is a huge clue . . .

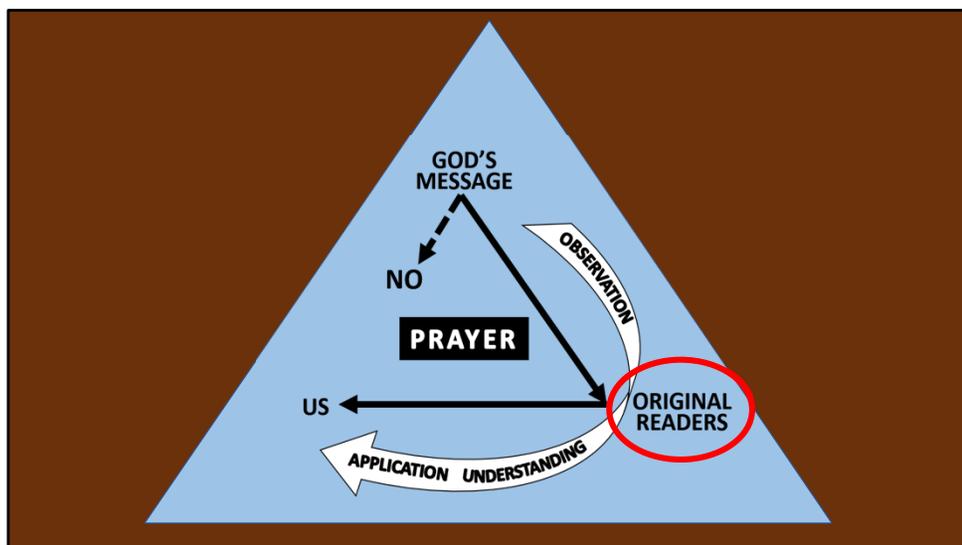
**“Let the one who boasts,
boast in the Lord.”**

1 Cor 1:31, 2 Cor 10:17

READ SLIDE

-- I'd like to expand the scope of our text a bit beyond what was in our study guides.

TR: Let's open our Bibles and first make observations about . . .



... what the apostle was communicating to the first century readers in Corinth.

TR: As we skim over the text from 2 Corinthians 11:16 to 12:10 ...

BOASTING . . .

11:16-21a

11:21b-29

11:30-33

12:1-9a

12:9b-10

8

. . . we can't miss the theme of boasting.

-- The Apostle is responding to the false apostles, the so-called super-apostles, his detractors.

-- Bringing forth their letters of reference, these interlopers made much of themselves.

-- And, by doing so they suggested that their distorted Gospel was the true one.

TR: Let's see this theme played out in the passage, starting back at 11:16 . . .

2 Corinthians 11:16-18

page 1072 in handout Bibles

I repeat, let no one think me foolish. But even if you do, accept me as a fool, so that I too may **boast** a little. ¹⁷What I am saying with this **boastful confidence**, I say not as the Lord would but as a fool. ¹⁸Since many boast according to the flesh, I too will boast.

ESV

9

READ SLIDE

-- Paul is going to boast **TOO**

-- But he knows that such boasting, in itself, is not as the Lord would do.

-- It doesn't mean his boasting to protect the purity of the gospel is wrong, but that he is repulsed by his need to do so.

TR: The false teachers did it, so he felt he needed to as well . . .

BOASTING . . .

11:16-21a according to the flesh,

10

READ SLIDE

TR: The theme of boasting continues in the middle of verse 21 . . .

2 Corinthians 11:21b-23a

But whatever anyone else dares to boast of—I am speaking as a fool—I also dare to **boast** of that. ²²Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they offspring of Abraham? So am I. ²³**Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one . . .**

ESV

11

READ SLIDE

TR: Whatever these false teachers could boast of . . .

BOASTING . . .

11:16-21a **according to the flesh,**
11:21b-29 **whatever they boast of,**
of servanthood

12

. . . So could Paul . . .

-- and then he turned to the question of boasting in being a servant of Christ.

-- He showed how a servant is willing to pay the many different prices paid when truly meeting the needs of others.

-- The false teachers would have said something like (in the words of D.A. Carson), *"I have established more churches; I have preached the gospel in more lands to more ethnic groups; I have traveled more miles; I have won more converts; I have written more books; I have raised more money; I have dominated more councils; I have walked with God more fervently and seen more vision; I have commanded the greatest crowds and performed the most spectacular miracles."*

-- Paul's "brag sheet" was not in line with the false teachers' or the Caesars' of Rome.

TR: His many afflictions and anxieties then move Paul to another dynamic of his boasting in verse 30, which is where our workbook started out, . . .

If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. ³¹The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, he who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying.

ESV

READ SLIDE

- Paul has to take a vow to underline that he isn't lying.
- What he has to say is so opposed to what the false teachers would have called "normal," or "boast-worthy," . . .
- . . . Paul preemptively heads off the retort, "That can't be true!"

TR: What happened that was so humiliating?

2 Corinthians 11:32-33

At Damascus, the governor under King Aretas was guarding the city of Damascus in order to seize me, ³³but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall and escaped his hands.

ESV

14

READ SLIDE

TR: This event was an example of how Paul boasted of. . .

BOASTING . . .

**11:16-21a according to the flesh,
11:21b-29 whatever they boast of,
11:30-33 of what shows weakness,**

15

READ SLIDE

TR: Paul's boasting then takes an interesting turn in chapter 12 . . .

2 Corinthians 12:1-2

I must go on boasting. Though there is nothing to be gained by it, I will go on to **visions and revelations** of the Lord. ²I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows.

ESV

16

Again, Paul warns that this boasting isn't really what will build people up . . . But he must, in order to deal with the false teachers.

-- READ SLIDE

-- Verses 3-4 continue his explanation of this incredible experience. One that he had told no one about for 14 years.

TR: Then in verse 5 we read . . .

2 Corinthians 12:5-6

On behalf of this man I will **boast**, but on my own behalf I will **not boast**, except of my weaknesses— ⁶though if I should wish to **boast**, I would not be a fool, for I would be speaking the truth; but I refrain from it, so that no one may think more of me than he sees in me or hears from me.

ESV

17

... As Paul continues to write in the 3Rd person ... Speaking about himself but not wanting to do the kind of boasting that Jesus finds repulsive.

-- READ SLIDE

-- Again Paul affirms that what he is saying is the truth.

-- He wants his reputation to rest on what he actually did or said, not on boasts about those things that could not be verified by observation.

TR: Then in verse 7 Paul changes gears to boast in something most wouldn't have mentioned.

2 Corinthians 12:7

So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited.

ESV

18

READ SLIDE

- Paul understood that great spiritual experiences could lead to great arrogance.
- The false teachers claimed to have great experiences, but they seemed oblivious to the dangers of pride.
- [thorn] = malaria, serious eye condition, Jewish persecution, epilepsy, a marked speech defect, some sort of continued temptation, etc., etc.
- thorn came AFTER “surpassingly great revelations,” therefore not a birth defect or some character flaw.
- messenger of Satan AND given by God – work of Satan and God

TR: If the thorn was something others could witness, it would raise the question why didn't God take it away.

2 Corinthians 12:8-9a

19

Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me.
⁹But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

ESV

In great humility, Paul writes . . . READ SLIDE

- What a marvelous word for us today, in the midst of whatever challenges we are facing . . .**
- . . . from the dying and death of loved ones, to soul-rattling diagnosis of cancer or cancer's return, to an economy in free-fall.**
- But we will get back to applying the text to our lives in a moment.**

TR: Paul was boasting, but in ways that the world doesn't understand but Jesus would applaud.

BOASTING . . .

**11:16-21a according to the flesh,
11:21b-29 whatever they boast of,
11:30-33 of what shows weakness,
12:1-9a of visions & revelations (sort of),**

20

He boasted . . . REVIEW SLIDE

TR: He then summarizes at the end of verses 9 and 10, based on the promise that “Christ’s power is made perfect in weakness” . . .

2 Corinthians 12:9b

**Therefore I will boast all the more
gladly of my weaknesses,** so that the
power of Christ may rest upon me.

ESV

21

READ SLIDE

TR: Verse 10

2 Corinthians 12:10

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.

ESV

22

READ SLIDE

TR: Driven to it by the need to deal with the false teachers, whose marketing campaign was winning over the Corinthians, Paul . . .

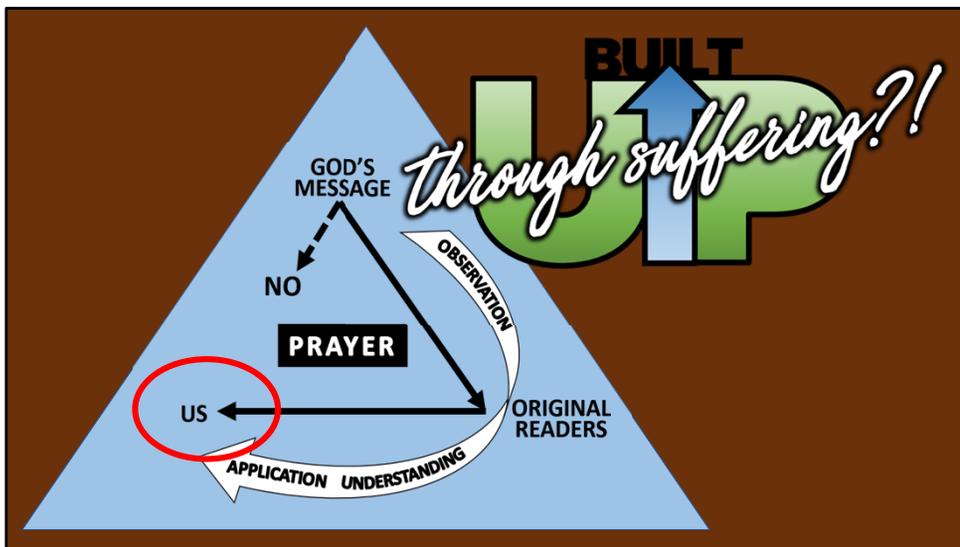
BOASTING . . .

**11:16-21a according to the flesh,
11:21b-29 whatever they boast of,
11:30-33 of what shows weakness,
12:1-9a of visions & revelations (sort of),
12:9b-10 of weaknesses.**

23

**. . . played their game . . . well, sort of.
-- He turned their worldly boasting on its head.**

**TR: With that as a brief overview of what Paul was saying to the
Corinthians, we now have to turn the corner . . .**



24

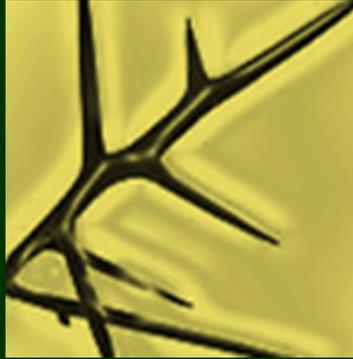
... and prayerfully ask how this applies to us.

-- What does all this teach us about being built[^]UP through suffering?

-- How does God want us to welcome the truth into our lives ... for such a time as this?

TR: I think there are **FOUR THORNY TRUTHS** that we must receive about how ...

Suffering can Build^UP by . . .



25

. . . READ SLIDE

TR: While we may not be able to boast according to the flesh like Paul, his boasting of being a servant reminds us that . . .

Suffering can Build^UP by . . .



**showing us to be “better”
servants of Christ**

26

READ SLIDE

TR: Remember back in 11:23

2 Corinthians 11:21b-23a

But whatever anyone else dares to boast of—I am speaking as a fool—I also dare to boast of that. ²²Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they offspring of Abraham? So am I. ²³**Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one . . .**

ESV

27

“Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one . . .”

-- Paul talks like a madman . . . but he goes on to show that the measure of our servanthood is proportional to the price we've been willing to pay on behalf of others.

-- Paul is NOT suggesting that hurting ourselves is what God is calling for.

-- He is modeling that following the will of God as a servant of Christ will cost us.

TR: And the cost is not just physical stuff, as verses 28-29 tell us . . .

And, apart from other things, there is **the daily pressure on me of my anxiety** for all the churches. ²⁹Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant?

ESV

READ SLIDE

- Scripture does tell us, “do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.”
- That too is the Apostle Paul writing in Philippians 4:6.
- Just like parents carry the daily pressure of trying to care for their children’s needs, so do all servants feel the weight of others’ concerns.
- That means we then cast our cares upon the Lord in prayer . . . which is one of the great practices of a godly servant.

TR: Suffering is hard to bear up under, but it helps to remember that we, and others, can be built up by it . . .

Suffering can Build^UP by . . .



showing us to be “better”
servants of Christ

29

REVIEW SLIDE

- Even as King David did not want to make an offering to God that cost him nothing . . .
- . . . can we take a moment to rejoice in the privilege of suffering and sacrifice on behalf of others? In the name of Christ?

TR: When there is a price to pay . . . and we pay it graciously and willingly, like Jesus did for us, there is a powerful building up process at work.

1 Peter 4:1-2

Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, **for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin,** ²so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God.

ESV

30

After Peter calls us to follow in Christ's steps, he writes . . . READ SLIDE

-- I know that the road the Lord may be calling you to follow is hard . . . but if you follow in the power of the Spirit, you will be a "better" servant.

TR: The Psalmist said . . .

Psalms 119:67

**Before I was afflicted I went astray,
but now I keep your word.**

ESV

31

READ SLIDE

TR: As has been said many times before . . .

**There is no *testimony*
without a *test*.**

READ SLIDE

- The great stories all include conflict, pain, challenges.
- We are not the ultimate authors of our own stories . . . we do not put the tests into our lives . . . but by God's grace we can embrace them and look for Him to work through them.
- Will we today say thank you to God for the challenges, the tests? I don't think we can be built up by them if we won't.

TR: At the same time there's another THORNY TRUTH about how suffering can build us up . . .

Suffering can Build^UP by . . .



showing us to be “better”
servants of Christ



revealing we are not the hero
of the story

33

READ SLIDE

-- The “testimony” is not about us and how we passed the tests . . .
it is about THE HERO, our Lord Jesus.

TR: Remember in 11:30 . . .

If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. ³¹The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, he who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying.

ESV

READ SLIDE (verse 30 only)

-- We may ask why this lowering down the wall was so hard for Paul.

-- Luke's account in Acts seems to focus on God's providential watch-care, but Paul said it showed his weakness.

TR: One author suggested that we might understand this easier if we knew that the highest medal of honor in the Roman world was the . . .

MURAL CROWN –
(Latin: corona muralis),
Also referred to as the
"walled crown", this was a
golden crown, or circle of
gold intended to resemble a
battlement, bestowed upon
the first soldier who climbed
the wall of a besieged city
and to successfully place the
standard of the attacking
army upon it.



35

REVIEW SLIDE

-- The medal of honor went to the soldier who climbed the wall . . .
-- . . . not the one who was lowered down the wall in a smelly old
basket.

TR: Paul's boasting in the things that showed his weakness helps
me remember . . .

Suffering can Build^UP by . . .



showing us to be “better”
servants of Christ



revealing we are not the hero
of the story

36

. . . even as my weaknesses help remind me . . . that I’m NOT the hero of the story.

-- Apart from Christ we can do nothing.

-- Will we allow our weakness, our inability to shield people from the challenges of this situation, to help us turn their focus on to Jesus?

-- When we comfort our children, is it suggested that WE will protect them? Really?

-- Only God can protect . . . and if He chooses to let us be hurt, He is the only One Who can redeem the hurt.

TR: A third THORNY TRUTH is that often suffering often gives us an

. . .

Suffering can Build^UP by . . .

-  showing us to be “better” servants of Christ
-  revealing we are not the hero of the story
-  giving me an ego-deflating thorn for my humility

37

. . . ego-deflating thorn for our humility

-- God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble.

TR: Why did Paul allow this thorn in Paul's life?

2 Corinthians 12:7

So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, **to keep me from becoming conceited.**

ESV

38

Paul repeats the answer twice . . . “to keep me from becoming conceited.”

TR: We live in a world that wants us to built up our self-esteem . . .

Suffering can Build^UP by . . .

-  showing us to be “better” servants of Christ
-  revealing we are not the hero of the story
-  giving me an ego-deflating thorn for my humility

39

. . . which often translates into boasting about ourselves and our accomplishments.

-- As parents we ache when our children don't think much of themselves . . .

-- . . . but the answer is not to pad their self-esteem. It is not to flatter them.

-- Rather, it is to help them understand Christ-esteem. And that every strength and ability they have is a gift from God.

-- It is hard for us to imagine that great spiritual experiences carry great danger as well as great blessing.

-- How aware are you of the lurking dangers of pride? Pride as an employee, parent, spouse, leader?

TR: The final THORNY TRUTH that the Lord pricked me with was the reminder that . . .

Suffering can Build^UP by . . .

-  showing us to be “better” servants of Christ
-  revealing we are not the hero of the story
-  giving me an ego-deflating thorn for my humility
-  perfecting the power of contentment in me

40

READ SLIDE

TR: Let's review from 12:8 and following

2 Corinthians 12:8-9a

Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me.
⁹But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

ESV

41

READ SLIDE

TR: Verse 9 continues . . .

2 Corinthians 12:9b-10

Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, **so that** the power of Christ may rest upon me.
¹⁰For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

ESV

42

READ SLIDE

- We yearn for the power of Christ to rest on us . . . but it comes as we boast of our weaknesses.
 - It comes as we pay the price and find it is too hard and too costly . . . so we cling to Christ.
 - It comes as we realize that we cannot be the hero who climbs the wall first . . . and that we dare not steal the glory from the One Who torn the Temple curtain in two, our Savior Jesus.
 - The power of Christ comes as we embrace humility, having the same mind in us that Jesus had.
 - The power comes when we ask in faith for a thorn to be removed, but then receive sufficient grace when the Lord deems it best that the prickle remains in our lives.
- TR: It comes when . . .

2 Corinthians 12:9b-10

Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.
¹⁰For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

ESV

43

. . . we allow the Holy Spirit to perfect the power of contentment in us.

-- Notice that Paul says he boasts “all the more gladly”

-- God wants us to be fully alive and blessed today . . . not always saying, “I’ll be happy when . . .”

TR: The great promise is the His grace is sufficient, even as Jesus said . . .

"Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. **Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.**"

ESV

READ SLIDE

- Today has sufficient trouble.
- Today Jesus promises sufficient grace.
- If His grace does not seem sufficient, perhaps it is because we have borrowed tomorrow's troubles.

TR: In my notes I wrote this . . .

**Sufficient grace is
our daily bread.**

READ SLIDE

- We pray as our Lord taught us . . . give us this day our daily bread.
- Yet in our hearts we yearn to hoard bread or to borrow tomorrow's troubles and bring them into today.

- Won't you join me in receiving the thorny truths that suffering can really build us up?
- Won't you join me in thanking our Lord for the daily bread of His sufficient grace?

- EX: Tim Maxson – 31 brain cancer; severe osteoporosis, spine compression, paralyzed for 5 ½ weeks, learn to walk again with a walker but always in pain. 1 ½ years later dealing with depression, not sleeping, constant pain. Asked the Dr. “Is this what God saved me for?” Dr. turned away and got prescription pad and was silent for a time. He then asked, “Where you supposed to live?” “Were you supposed to ever walk again?” “Is God's grace sufficient?”