

THE GOSPEL FOR GROWN-UPS!

MID-WEEK BIBLE STUDY | LESSON 3

DON'T LET IT GET THE BEST OF YOU SERIES

SCRIPTURE LESSON

⁷ And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. ⁸ For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. ⁹ And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. ¹⁰ Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong. (2 Corinthians 12:7–10, KJV 1900)

I. Introduction

A. Narrative:

1. I love movies. I love Tinseltown. I love the big screen, the story lines, the characters, the drama, the suspense, and the unforgettable scenes that stay with you long after the credits have rolled. But anybody who loves movies knows that before you ever watch the movie, somebody has already told you something about its content by giving it a rating.
2. There is G, which means General Audiences. Everybody can come in. Everybody can watch it. The content has been deemed suitable for just about anybody. Then there is PG, which means Parental Guidance Suggested. The material may be a little more serious, and parents need to decide whether their children are mature enough to handle what they are about to see. Then there is PG-13. This rating warns parents that some of the material may not be appropriate for children under thirteen. And then there is the much-dreaded R rating. R means Restricted. The content is

- mature. You may hear some things, see some things, and encounter some things that everybody is not prepared to handle.
3. But I want to suggest that somewhere in the life of every serious disciple, every maturing Christian, and every serious student of Scripture, there is another rating that Hollywood has never invented. It is called GF! You are probably asking, "What on earth does GF mean?" GF means for GROWN FOLKS! Because there are some truths about God that you cannot understand while you are spiritually immature.
 4. There are some passages of Scripture that will challenge the shallow theology that says that if I love God, nothing bad should ever happen to me. There are some experiences with God that require enough spiritual maturity to admit that God does not always explain Himself, God does not always remove what hurts, God does not always stop what attacks us, and God does not always answer prayer the way we requested it.
 5. This lesson is rated GF because this is the Gospel for people who have lived long enough, walked with God long enough, cried enough tears, survived enough storms, buried enough expectations, endured enough disappointment, and experienced enough of God to know:
 - God can fix every problem, but He doesn't.
 - God can remove every thorn, but sometimes He leaves it.
 - God is good, yet sometimes He permits bad things to happen to His children.
 - God has all power, yet He allows seasons in which we feel powerless.
 - God can stop the storm, but sometimes He teaches us how to survive it.

God can change the situation, but sometimes He changes us in the situation.

 - God can close the door on trouble, but sometimes He walks through the door of trouble with us.
 - God can keep the enemy from attacking, but sometimes He makes the enemy's attack work for our advancement.
 - God can take away what hurts, but sometimes He gives us grace to carry what hurts.
 - God can make life easier, but sometimes He uses what is hard to make us stronger.

That is not kindergarten Christianity. That is the Gospel for Grown Folks!

B. Textual Analysis

1. Second Corinthians 12 brings us into one of the most intimate rooms in the Apostle Paul's spiritual life. Paul allows us to see something that mature believers eventually discover: great revelation does not exempt you from great tribulation. In fact, sometimes the two travel together.
2. Paul has just described an extraordinary spiritual experience. He speaks of a man "caught up to the third heaven." He heard "unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter." Paul had been permitted to experience realities beyond the ordinary dimensions of human existence. He had been taken up!
3. But then verse 7 changes the scenery. Paul essentially says, After I went up, something was sent to keep me down. ***"And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh..."*** Do not move past that too quickly. Paul had revelations, but Paul also had a thorn. He had an experience in heaven and a problem on earth. He had revelation in his spirit and irritation in his flesh. He had seen what most people would never see, heard what most people would never hear, and experienced what most people would never experience, yet none of it exempted him from suffering.
4. That is GF theology! Paul never definitively identifies the thorn. Across Christian history interpreters have proposed physical illness, persecution, spiritual harassment, opposition, or some other debilitating affliction. The text leaves the precise identity unstated, perhaps because the theological purpose of the thorn is more important than its medical or circumstantial diagnosis. We may not know exactly what the thorn was, but Paul tells us why it was there: ***"lest I should be exalted above measure."***
5. The thorn was painful, but it was purposeful. Then Paul says something astonishing: ***"there was given to me a thorn in the flesh."*** The Greek verb translated ***"given"*** is *didōmi*, meaning to give, grant, bestow, or entrust. Paul does not say, "I went looking for a thorn." He does not say, "I requested a thorn." He says, "There was GIVEN to me..."
6. Here is the uncomfortable Gospel for Grown Folks: Everything God gives you will not initially feel like a gift. Some gifts come wrapped in paper. Some gifts come wrapped in pain. Some gifts make you

shout immediately. Other gifts make you cry before you understand why you ought to shout. The thorn was something Paul wanted removed, but God saw something Paul needed developed.

7. Then the tension becomes even greater because Paul calls the thorn ***“the messenger of Satan to buffet me.”*** The word translated “buffet” carries the force of striking or beating, literally the imagery of being hit with the fist. Paul does not describe a gentle inconvenience. He describes repeated assault.
Yet here is the shout: While Satan is doing the buffeting, but God is accomplishing the developing.
-The enemy intends pain. God extracts purpose.
-The enemy intends destruction. God produces development.
-The enemy hits Paul, but every blow pushes Paul closer to God.
8. Paul therefore prays three times for the thorn to leave. Surely if anybody could get a prayer answered, Paul could! Yet God’s answer is not the answer Paul requested. God does not say, “I will remove it.” God says, ***“My grace is sufficient for thee.”***
9. In other words: Paul, I am not going to change your thorn. I am going to change your understanding of My grace. Paul wanted removal.
10. God offered sufficiency. Paul wanted God to change his circumstances. God revealed that His power could operate in the circumstances. ***“For my strength is made perfect in weakness.”*** The Greek concept behind ***“made perfect”*** (teleitai, from teleō) carries the idea of being brought to completion, reaching its intended goal, or being fully accomplished. God’s power does not become stronger because Paul becomes weaker. Rather, Paul’s weakness becomes the stage upon which the completeness of Christ’s power becomes unmistakable.
11. That changes Paul’s entire vocabulary. At first Paul says, “Take it away!” By the end Paul says, “I will glory in it!” The thorn did not change. Paul changed. That is spiritual maturity. That is Gospel for Grown Folks.

C. Parallel

1. This study is for Grown Folks who refuse to let trouble trample their faith; Grown Folks who will not allow Satan to get the best of them.
2. Grown Folks who know that tears do not mean God has abandoned them; Grown Folks who understand that unanswered prayer does

not mean unheard prayer; Grown Folks who can worship with a thorn, praise through pressure, believe while being buffeted, and declare that if God does not move it, His grace is still enough to carry me through it!

- D. Proposition: So what do we learn about God when the Gospel is for Grown Folks?

II. GOD HAS USED THE ENEMY TO TAKE YOU TO THE NEXT LEVEL OF GROWTH

- A. Practical Idea-Grown folks have sayings that you do not really appreciate until you have lived awhile. You heard your grandmother say them when you were young, but you did not understand them because you had not lived long enough yet.
1. “The Lord will make a way somehow.”
 2. “It’s gonna be alright after while.”
 3. “He may not come when you want Him, but He’s always on time.”
 4. “If He brought you to it, He can bring you through it.”

When you were young, they sounded like clichés. But after you have survived some things, you discover those sayings were not born in classrooms. They were born in storms.

- B. Principle-
1. Paul’s testimony unfolds through three critical movements.
 2. First, there is THE BLESSING OF THE REVELATIONS. Paul has been caught up into the third heaven. He has experienced the supernatural presence of God in an extraordinary manner. He has been high spiritually, experientially, revelationally high.
 3. Second comes THE BURDEN OF THE THORN. Something has been “given” to Paul that he never requested. What a strange juxtaposition: God allows Paul to experience heaven and then permits him to live with a thorn.
 4. Third comes THE BUFFETING OF SATAN. Paul says the thorn operates as “the messenger of Satan to buffet me.”
 5. He has gone from revelation to irritation. From heaven to hurting. From being caught up to being beaten down. Paul could testify, I was high, and then I was brought low. Why would God permit it? Because there are some things you learn about God in the valley that you never learn on the mountaintop. When you are high, you

celebrate His blessings. When you are low, you discover His sufficiency.

When you are high, you know what God can give. When you are low, you discover who God is. And here is the shout buried in the theology of this text:

- C. Application-Our God is so awesome that He can make the devil bless you! Satan's buffeting becomes Paul's blessing, not because Satan suddenly wants Paul blessed, but because God sovereignly overrules Satan's intention.

1. Every time Satan hits Paul, Paul runs back to God. Every time the thorn hurts, Paul prays. Every attack drives Paul deeper into dependence. Sometimes when a believer gets hit and hurt, we run to God, climb into His lap, and stay there!
2. The devil says, "I am going to hurt him."
God says, "You are going to help him."
The devil says, "I am going to weaken him."
God says, "You are going to make him depend upon My strength."
The devil says, "I am going to drive him crazy."
God says, "You are going to drive him closer to Me!"

- D. Doctrinal Truth- GOD AND SATAN ARE NOT EQUALS

1. Never read 2 Corinthians 12 as though God and Satan are two equal powers fighting over Paul.
2. Christianity is not cosmic dualism.
3. Here's the shout.....
-Satan is a creature; God is the Creator.
-Satan possesses limited power; God possesses omnipotence.
-Satan operates within boundaries; God determines the boundaries.
4. So here is some Gospel for Grown Folks:
-God has all power; Satan has some power.
-God is sovereign; Satan is subordinate.
-God is Creator; Satan is created.
-God is eternal; Satan had a beginning.
-God is omniscient; Satan does not know everything.
-God is omnipresent; Satan cannot be everywhere.
-God is omnipotent; Satan's power is limited.
-God operates by His own authority; Satan operates only within permitted boundaries.
-God establishes the limits; Satan cannot cross God's line.

- God sees the end from the beginning; Satan cannot see tomorrow.
- God can use Satan's attacks; Satan cannot overthrow God's purposes.
- Satan can buffet you; God can bless you through the buffeting.
- Satan can attack your weakness; God can reveal His strength through your weakness.
- Satan may mean it for destruction; God can transform it into development.

5. And when Satan has done everything God permits him to do, GOD WILL STILL HAVE THE LAST WORD!

E. Biblical Illustration-Consider the story of JOB

1. If you need biblical evidence, ask Job. Job 1 pulls the curtain back on the unseen world and reveals something Job himself did not initially know. Satan could not simply walk into Job's life and do whatever he wanted. God established the boundaries.

2. The Lord said concerning Job, "Behold, all that he hath is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand." There was a line. And Satan could not cross it. Later God permits the testing to intensify, but again there is a boundary: "Behold, he is in thine hand; but save his life." There is the theology! Satan had permission, but God maintained sovereignty.

3. The enemy could touch Job's possessions. He could touch his circumstances. He could touch his body. But he could not operate outside the boundaries established by God. And when the story is finished, Job declares, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee."

4. Did you catch it? The attack introduced Job to a dimension of God he had never known before. Job essentially says, Before this happened, I had heard about You. After surviving this, I KNOW You differently! The enemy took something from Job, but the experience gave Job something too.

F. Practical Illustration

1. I think about my friend Dr. Kirbyjon Caldwell, the longtime leader associated with Windsor Village in Houston, Texas. Dr. Caldwell knew what it was to stand before thousands. He knew prominence, influence, presidential relationships, national recognition, community development, and extraordinary ministry success.

2. But life took him from the heights of influence into the confines of federal prison. The circumstances that led him there were serious. He pleaded guilty to conspiracy to commit wire fraud, publicly apologized for his conduct, and served years in federal custody. We should never minimize the people who were hurt or pretend that painful consequences are insignificant.

3. But that is not where his story ended. The man who entered prison was still a man who believed in God. Before reporting to prison, Caldwell publicly affirmed that God was with him and that God was not finished with him. And after his years of incarceration, he publicly reflected on the evolution of his faith through the experience.

4. That is where this illustration meets Paul.

-Sometimes your next classroom will not have a desk.

-Sometimes your next seminary will not have a campus.

-Sometimes your next lesson about God will be taught in a place you never wanted to go.

-And sometimes you discover that while your surroundings can restrict your movement, they cannot restrict God's presence.

5. They can lock a door, but they cannot lock God out.

They can limit where you go, but they cannot limit where grace goes.

They can change your address, but they cannot change God's ability to meet you there.

And that is the Gospel for Grown Folks!

6. Sometimes the place you prayed never to enter becomes the place where you encounter God in a way you never knew Him before.

Paul says, I went to the third heaven and received revelation but I lived with a thorn and discovered grace. Job says, I lost what I had but now mine eye seeth Thee. And the mature believer says:

-“Lord, if You don't move it, grow me through it.”

-“If You don't stop it, strengthen me in it.”

-“If You don't change it, change me through it.”

Because I have finally grown enough to understand: EVERYTHING THAT HURTS ME DOESN'T HAVE TO HINDER ME! GOD CAN USE WHAT HURTS ME TO HELP GROW ME! THAT'S THE GOSPEL FOR GROWN FOLKS!

- G. Moment of Meditation: In what ways has some of life's difficulties caused you to grow spiritually?

III. GOD HAS GIVEN YOU A NEW DEFINITION OF GRACE

- A. Practical Idea-Grown folks understand that words change meaning as you live longer.

1. When you are a child and somebody says grace, you think they are talking about what you say before you eat. Mama puts the food on the table, everybody grabs somebody's hand, heads are bowed, and somebody says, "Who is going to say grace?"
2. Then you become a young adult, start paying your own bills, and grace takes on another meaning! The bill was due on the first, but they give you until the tenth before the late fee hits or the service is interrupted. That's the grace period.
3. But when you have walked with God awhile, survived some storms, endured some disappointments, prayed some prayers that did not turn out the way you wanted, and lived through some things you thought would destroy you, grace takes on an entirely different definition. Grace is no longer just what you say before dinner. Grace is no longer just extra time to pay a bill. Grace is what God gives you when He does not give you what you asked Him for! That's Gospel for Grown Folks!

- B. Principle-

1. Paul says in verse 8, ***"For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me."*** Do not rush past that sentence. Paul prayed. Paul believed. Paul asked. And Paul asked again.
2. The word translated ***"besought"*** comes from the Greek parakaleō, a word that can carry the sense of pleading, appealing, entreating, urging, or earnestly requesting. This was not a casual prayer. Paul desperately wanted this thorn gone. And he prayed about it three

times. "Lord, take it away." Nothing.

"Lord, please take it away." The thorn remained. "Lord, I am asking You again, take this thing away!"

3. And God said: NO. That may be one of the hardest words in the Christian vocabulary. Because we love preaching about prayers God answers yes.

-We testify about the door God opened.

-We shout about the cancer that disappeared.

-We celebrate the child who came home.

-We praise God for the job that came through.

-We dance over the marriage that was restored.

-But where is the testimony when God says no?

4. What do you do when you prayed correctly, believed sincerely, asked repeatedly and God still does not do what you requested? This is where we must make an important distinction: God did hear Paul.

5. The evidence that God heard Paul is that God answered Paul! God's answer simply was not the answer Paul wanted.

-Sometimes "No" is an answered prayer.

-Sometimes God says, "No, I will not remove it."

-Sometimes God says, "No, I will not change them."

-Sometimes God says, "No, I will not reopen that door."

-Sometimes God says, "No, I will not restore what you lost."

-Sometimes God says, "No, I will not let you go back."

-And spiritual maturity is reaching the place where I can hear God's

6. NO without allowing His no to destroy my YES to Him!

That's Gospel for Grown Folks!

7. Here is the tension of the text.

-THE PROBLEM WITH PRAYER: God sometimes does not give us what we request. But here is the other side:

-THE POWER OF GRACE: God always gives us enough to handle what He permits. Paul asks for removal. God gives him grace. Paul asks God to change his condition. God strengthens Paul's capacity. Paul wants God to take something from him. God puts something within him. Paul says, "Lord, remove my thorn."

-God says, ***"My grace is sufficient for thee."***

8. The Greek word translated ***"sufficient"*** is *arkeō*, carrying the idea of being enough, adequate, satisfactory, or sufficient for what is

required. God essentially says: “Paul, what I give you is enough for what you’re going through.” Not enough grace for somebody else’s thorn. Enough grace for yours. Not enough grace for tomorrow’s hypothetical problem.

9. Enough grace for today’s problem. Not enough grace to make you independent. Enough grace to keep you dependent upon Him. Grace means GOD IS ENOUGH!

10. **PERFECTION IN WEAKNESS**

Then God says something that turns ordinary thinking upside down: ***“For my strength is made perfect in weakness.”***

The world says strength is demonstrated when weakness disappears.

God says His strength is displayed through weakness.

-The world says, “Hide your weakness.” God says, “I’ll use it.”

-The world says, “Be ashamed of it.” God says, “I’ll put My power on it.” Because the weaker Paul becomes in himself, the more clearly Paul discovers the strength of Christ.

11. This is not glorifying helplessness or refusing appropriate help. It is recognizing that human limitation creates an arena in which divine sufficiency becomes unmistakable. Paul discovers:
When I cannot, God can. When I don’t have enough, God is enough. When my strength runs out, His strength takes over.

C. Application:

THERE IS A BLESSING OF BEING WEAK ENOUGH TO BECOME STRONG

1. I had to get weak enough to stop trusting myself.
2. I had to get weak enough to discover how strong God really is.
3. I had to get weak enough to stop leaning on people and start leaning on God.
4. I had to get weak enough to learn that prayer is not my last resort but my first response.
5. I had to get weak enough to discover that God’s grace works where my strength quits.
6. I had to get weak enough to stop pretending I had everything under control.
7. I had to get weak enough to discover that God never lost control.
8. I had to get weak enough to stop depending on what I had and start

depending on Who I had.

9. I had to get weak enough to discover strength I didn't know God had placed within me.
10. I had to get weak enough to learn that tears and faith can occupy the same face.
11. I had to get weak enough to learn that being tired does not mean being defeated.
12. I had to get weak enough to discover that broken places can become blessed places.
13. I had to get weak enough to learn that a thorn cannot cancel an anointing.
14. I had to get weak enough to discover that what I cannot carry, grace can.
15. AND I HAD TO GET WEAK ENOUGH TO FIND OUT THAT WHEN I GET TO THE END OF ME, I HAVE NOT REACHED THE END OF GOD!

D. Doctrinal Lesson-FIVE IDIOMS OF GOD'S GRACE

1. Grown Folks eventually discover that grace wears different clothes in different seasons.
2. There is **PROVISIONAL GRACE**. This is the grace that provides what I cannot provide for myself. God supplies needs, opens doors, sends resources, makes ways, and provides what is necessary for the journey.
3. There is **SUSTAINING GRACE**. This is 2 Corinthians 12 grace. This grace does not always remove the thorn, it keeps you while the thorn remains. Provisional grace says, "God will provide." Sustaining grace says, "God will hold me together until I get through this."
4. There is **AMAZING GRACE**. This is the grace that looks beyond what I deserve and gives me what I could never earn. It saves sinners, forgives failures, receives prodigals, and gives another chance to people who have exhausted their own chances. That's why the church has sung for generations, "Amazing grace!"
5. There is **LIFE-CHANGING GRACE**. Grace does not merely pardon us; grace transforms us. Paul testified in 1 Corinthians 15:10, "But by the grace of God I am what I am." Grace found Paul one way and left him another way. Real grace does not merely change your destination; it changes your disposition.
6. And finally, there is **DYING GRACE**. This is the grace God gives

His children when it is time to leave this world. The God who gave us grace to live will give us grace to die. Stephen could face death and see heaven opened. Paul could approach the end declaring, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith." When the last mile comes, there will be grace for that mile too!

E. Biblical Illustration | NOAH AND THE ARK

1. The Bible's first explicit use of the word "grace" in the KJV gives us a magnificent picture. Genesis 6:8 declares: "But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD." The world was wicked. Judgment was coming. The rain was coming. The flood was coming!
2. Now here's the shout, before the water ever fell, grace showed up!
 - Grace did not mean Noah would never see a storm.
 - Grace gave Noah what he needed to survive the storm.
 - Grace gave him God's favor.
 - Grace gave him God's warning.
 - Grace gave him God's instructions.
 - Grace gave him God's covenant.
 - Grace gave him an ark.
3. And when the rain came, the same water that destroyed the world beneath Noah lifted the ark carrying Noah! That's what grace can do. Grace does not always stop the rain. Sometimes grace teaches you how to float! Sometimes God doesn't stop the flood. He builds you an ark! That's Gospel for Grown Folks!

F. Practical Illustration

1. I remember the story of an usher in San Antonio who received news nobody wants to hear. There was a brain tumor, and the diagnosis was inoperable. Think about that word: inoperable. That means the physicians have reached the boundary of what medicine can presently do. But the boundary of human ability is not the boundary of divine grace. She had prayed for healing. Others prayed for healing. She believed God was able to heal.
2. But sometimes the miracle is not that God immediately removes what threatens you. Sometimes the miracle is that you keep serving while it is still there. She could still stand. Still serve. Still worship. Still smile. Still trust God. Her condition was saying, "You ought to fall apart." But grace kept saying, "I'm sufficient." Her diagnosis

said, "You're weak." God said, "That's exactly where My strength works best." Because sometimes the greatest testimony is not: "Look what God took away from me." Sometimes the greater testimony is: "Look at what I've been carrying and look at how God has been carrying me!"

THAT'S GRACE FOR GROWN FOLKS!

G. Moment of Meditation: Take a moment and think about the grace of God for a moment. Now write your definition in the blank space below. Hold on to it and remember it because it is your definition of the Lord's grace!

IV. GOD HAS GIVEN US A REASON TO EXPRESS OUR GRATITUDE

- A. Practical Idea There is something else grown folks understand. When you are young, you usually thank people for what they give you.
1. You thank somebody for the birthday gift.
 2. You thank somebody for buying dinner.
 3. You thank somebody for giving you money.
 4. You thank somebody for doing you a favor.
 5. But when you mature, gratitude changes. You start thanking people not simply for what they gave you, but for what their presence meant to you when life became difficult.
- B. Principle-And spiritually grown people eventually reach a place where they can thank God not just because He changed something, but because He kept them while it remained unchanged! Look at Paul's transformation.
1. Verse 8: "Take it away!"
 2. Verse 9: "My grace is sufficient." Then Paul says:
 - 3, "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me."

4. Wait a minute, Paul! The thorn is still there? Yes! The messenger is still buffeting you? Yes! Your request for removal was denied? Yes!
5. Then why are you rejoicing? Because Paul has discovered something greater than the removal of his thorn. He has discovered the resting of Christ's power!
6. This may be the greatest miracle in the entire passage. God does not change the thorn. God changes Paul's attitude toward the thorn. Paul moves from begging to boasting. From praying for escape to praising for empowerment. From "Take it away!" to "I'll glory in it!" That is growth.
7. The word translated "**glory**" (*kauchaomai*) carries the idea of boasting, rejoicing, or taking pride in something. Paul is not celebrating pain for pain's sake. He is celebrating what his weakness makes possible: "**that the power of Christ may rest upon me.**" The verb behind "rest upon" (*episkēnoō*) evokes the idea of dwelling, pitching a tent over, or taking up residence upon someone.
8. What a picture perfect portrait! Paul essentially says: "If my weakness creates a place for Christ's power to pitch its tent over my life, then I have found something worth rejoicing about!"
 - I don't like the thorn.
 - But I love the power resting on me.
 - I don't like the weakness.
 - But I love the Christ who meets me there.
 - I don't enjoy the pressure.
 - But I treasure the Presence that shows up in the pressure.

That's Gospel for Grown Folks!

C. Application - I'VE GOT A REASON TO THANK HIM

1. I thank Him because the thorn did not destroy me.
2. I thank Him because the attack did not defeat me.
3. I thank Him because the pressure did not break me.
4. I thank Him because the tears did not drown me.
5. I thank Him because the disappointment did not disconnect me from God.
6. I thank Him because when my strength left, His strength stayed.
7. I thank Him because when people walked away, His presence remained.
8. I thank Him because what hurt me also humbled me.

9. I thank Him because what weakened me drove me toward His strength.
10. I thank Him because what made me cry also made me pray.
11. I thank Him because what drove me to my knees put me in the perfect position to call His name.
12. I thank Him because Satan's attack could not cancel God's assignment.
13. I thank Him because my weakness became God's workplace.
14. I thank Him because grace carried what strength could not.
15. AND I THANK HIM BECAUSE AFTER EVERYTHING I'VE BEEN THROUGH, I'M STILL HERE, I'M STILL BELIEVING, I'M STILL SERVING, I'M STILL STANDING, AND I'VE STILL GOT A PRAISE!

D. Doctrinal Lesson Christian gratitude is deeper than thanking God when everything feels good. Paul says in verse 10: ***“Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.”*** Notice Paul’s list.

1. Infirmities.
2. Reproaches.
3. Necessities.
4. Persecutions.
6. Distresses.

Paul has not become thankful because he enjoys suffering. Paul is thankful because he has discovered that none of those things can stop Christ's power from operating in his life. The source of his gratitude is not the pain. The source of his gratitude is the Presence in the pain. Not the persecution. The power in the persecution. Not the weakness. The strength discovered through the weakness.

That means my praise does not have to wait until my circumstances change.

7. I can praise Him while I'm waiting.
8. I can worship Him while I'm hurting.
9. I can thank Him with tears in my eyes.
10. I can bless Him with the thorn still there.
11. Because grown folks have discovered: I DON'T NEED

EVERYTHING AROUND ME TO BE RIGHT TO KNOW THAT

EVERYTHING ABOUT MY GOD IS RIGHT!

E. Biblical Illustration-

1. Habakkuk gives us one of Scripture's greatest pictures of mature gratitude. Habakkuk 3:17–18 declares: ***“Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls:”***
2. That sounds terrible!
 - No figs.
 - No grapes.
 - No olives.
 - No crops.
 - No sheep.
 - No cattle.
3. Everything visible says, “There is nothing here worth praising God about.” Then Habakkuk says: ***“Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation.”*** There is one word that separates immature faith from grown-folks faith:
4. YET!
 - It hurts, YET!
 - I’m disappointed, YET!
 - I don’t understand, YET!
 - The thorn remains, YET!
 - My prayer wasn’t answered the way I wanted, YET!
 - I’m weak, YET!

YET I WILL REJOICE IN THE LORD!

That’s Gospel for Grown Folks!

E. Practical Illustration-

Sometimes grown folks can look back at something they once begged God to change and eventually say: “Lord, thank You for not answering that prayer the way I asked You to.”

1. You wanted the relationship, but God knew what you could not see.
2. You wanted the position, but God knew where it would lead.
3. You wanted that door opened, but God knew what was waiting

behind it.

4. You wanted immediate relief, but God knew there was maturity that could only be developed through endurance.
5. And years later you looked backward and realized: His NO protected me. His WAIT developed me. His GRACE sustained me. His POWER strengthened me!

V. Conclusion and Celebration

A. At some point in your walk with God, you have to **grow up in grace**. Because immature faith believes that if God loves me, He will keep everything from hurting me. Immature faith believes that if I pray hard enough, God will always change the situation. Immature faith believes that if I have enough faith, every thorn will be removed, every door will open, every enemy will disappear, and every prayer will be answered exactly the way I asked.

B. But that is not the Gospel for Grown Folks!

The Gospel for Grown Folks teaches you that sometimes **God will love you and still let it hurt**. Sometimes God will favor you and still let you struggle. Sometimes God will anoint you and still let you ache. Sometimes God will bless you and still let you battle. Sometimes God will hear your prayer and **not change His mind**.

Paul said, “**For this thing I besought the Lord thrice.**” Paul prayed once. Nothing changed. Paul prayed twice. Nothing changed. Paul prayed three times.

And the thorn was still there!

But Paul discovered something that every mature believer eventually has to learn: **an unanswered prayer does not mean an absent God!** God may not give you what you requested, because God knows what you require. Paul asked for **removal**. God gave him **grace**. Paul asked God to change the **circumstance**.

God changed Paul’s **capacity**. Paul asked God to take away the **weakness**. God showed Paul how to discover **strength in the middle of it!** And that is when the Gospel gets good to grown folks! Because when you have lived a little while, **grace means something different!** When you are young, grace is something somebody says before dinner.

When you become an adult, grace is the extra five days the company gives you before they cut the lights off. **But when you have walked with God through some storms, grace takes on an entirely different definition!** Grace is what kept you when you

should have collapsed. Grace is what carried you when you couldn't carry yourself. Grace is what held your mind together when your world was falling apart. Grace is what gave you strength to get out of bed when your heart wanted to stay under the covers. Grace is what let you worship with tears in your eyes. Grace is what let you preach while you were hurting. Grace is what let you serve while you were struggling. Grace is what let you smile while you were surviving something nobody knew anything about!

THAT'S GROWN-FOLKS GRACE!

And somebody studying this lesson has finally lived long enough to testify:

I didn't get everything I prayed for | BUT I GOT GRACE! I didn't get every door I knocked on | **BUT I GOT GRACE!** I didn't get every relationship I wanted | **BUT I GOT GRACE!** I didn't get every healing the way I expected | **BUT I GOT GRACE!** I didn't get every answer I wanted | **BUT I GOT GRACE!** And I discovered that **when God doesn't remove it, He will give me grace to endure it!**

When God doesn't stop it, **He'll strengthen me through it!** When God doesn't move it, **He'll mature me in it!** When God doesn't change them, **He'll change me!** When God doesn't calm the storm, **He'll calm His child!** When God doesn't remove the thorn, **He'll reveal His power!** Because His strength is made perfect **IN WEAKNESS!**

So now I don't have to pretend I'm strong. I don't have to act like nothing hurts. I don't have to convince everybody that I have it all together. **I can admit that I'm weak because I finally know where my strength comes from!** When I'm weak | **HE'S STRONG!** When I'm empty | **HE'S FULL!** When I'm confused | **HE'S WISE!** When I'm tired | **HE'S MY STRENGTH!** When I'm broken | **HE'S MY HEALER!** When I'm surrounded | **HE'S MY DEFENDER!** When I'm overwhelmed | **HE'S MY ROCK!** When I'm insufficient | **HIS GRACE IS STILL SUFFICIENT!**

And after everything I've been through, I've reached the place where I don't need God to explain everything anymore. **I've grown up now!** I don't have to understand it to trust Him. I don't have to like it to lean on Him. I don't have to see the way to know He's making one.

I don't have to feel strong to know I'm being strengthened.

I don't have to get my way to know **HE IS THE WAY!**

Because this is **THE GOSPEL FOR GROWN FOLKS!**

