

Rev. Lex DeLong / General Adult

Borrowed Breath: Learning to Live by The Source / 2 Corinthians 12:7–10

"God often refuses to remove the thorns that deplete our strength, because He knows that our utter weakness is the only environment where His perfect power can be fully displayed."

Notes

02/08 2 Cor. 12:7-10, "The Power Paradox: When 0% Battery Means 100% Strength," Scripture: Isaiah 40:29-31.

We've moved from the **Supply** (Lam 3), through the **Struggle** with worry (Matt 6), past the **Arrogance** of our plans (James 4), and now we arrive at the **Paradox**.

This is the "grand finale" of the *Borrowed Breath* series started at the beginning of January. We are moving from "God helps me" to the much deeper, more uncomfortable truth: **"God's power is most visible when I am at my least."**

We hate weakness (thorns). We want the thorn removed so we can be "strong" again. God says, "No, your weakness is the portal for My power." The "sufficient" grace in 2 Cor 12 connects back to the "sufficient" mercy in Lamentations 3.

Series: Borrowed Breath

Week 4: The Power Paradox

Text: 2 Corinthians 12:7-10

Congregational Reading: Isaiah 40:29-31

Main Idea: *God often refuses to remove the thorns that deplete our strength, because He knows that our utter weakness is the only environment where His perfect power can be fully displayed.*

Introduction: The Power Paradox

The Series Recap: Dismantling the Battery Myth

- We began this year on January 4th by looking at **Lamentations 3**, realizing that we aren't self-contained batteries; we are dependent vessels requiring **Daily Mercy**.
- On January 11th, we saw in **Matthew 6** how our **Worry** is actually the friction of trying to run a universe-sized life on a human-sized battery.

- Last sermon, we stood with **James** and repented of the **Arrogance** of our calendars, learning that we are but a "vapor" that must hand the eraser to the Architect.
- Today, we come to the final movement. We have spent three weeks learning that we are weak; today, we learn why that weakness is actually our greatest advantage.

Illustration: The Iron Lung and the Source

In the early 1950s, during the height of the polio epidemic, thousands of people lived inside a machine called the "Iron Lung." It was a massive steel cylinder that performed the act of breathing for those whose muscles had failed. For the patient inside, the machine was their "Source" of life. But **there was a terrifying reality**: the threat of a power outage. If the hospital electricity flickered, the machine stopped "breathing" for them.

We often approach our spiritual lives like those patients—terrified that our "internal battery" is going to run out. We live in a constant state of anxiety, trying to "store up" enough spiritual strength to survive. We want to be "healed" of our need for the machine so we can go out of it and breathe on our own.

But here is the paradox of the Kingdom: God doesn't take us out of the machine to make us independent. Instead, He reveals that the "Machine"—His Grace—is infinite, safe, sufficient, and the only place where we can breathe. It is full of life. And our "power outage"—our weakness—is the very thing that provides the setting for His system to work.

Paul is going to show us today that he didn't want a "rechargeable battery"; he wanted to be so dependent on the "Power Grid" of God that his own strength became irrelevant.

Main Idea: God often refuses to remove the thorns that deplete our strength, because He knows that our utter weakness is the only environment where His perfect power can be fully displayed.

I. God Uses Our Thorns to Keep Us Grounded in Him Instead of Ourselves (v. 7)

A. Our limitations are not interruptions; they are divine safety mechanisms

We often view our struggles as "glitches" that stop our progress. But in the Kingdom, the thorn is a Governor. Just as a high-performance engine has a rev-limiter to keep it from tearing itself apart, the thorn is the anchor that keeps our hearts grounded while God lifts our influence.

B. The constant "buffeting" ("torment" kolaphizē) of the thorn is designed to keep us awake to our need for the Source

Paul uses the present tense here—"torment" ἵνα με κολαφίζῃ. It means a continuous "striking with the fist." The thorn isn't a one-time event we "get over"; it is the persistent pressure that keeps us from drifting back into the "Battery Myth." It forces us to lean against God every single hour. That's because...

C. God loves us too much to let our success outshine our character

As A.W. Tozer famously noted, "It is doubtful whether God can bless a man greatly until He has hurt him deeply." If we were given the "revelations" or successes in our lives without the "restraint," we would eventually believe we are the Source. The thorn ensures that as our capacity grows, our desperation for God is always one step ahead because it grows even faster. Even so, God wants us to pray to Him about the thorn. The whole point of that thorn is for that sole reason, to draw our attention to Him. So, what happens then, when we do pray for God to take away the thorn? This is the Mystery of the "No"

II. God Answers Our Pleading for Relief with a Plan for His Perfecting Power (v. 8-9a)

It is not that He is actually saying no to what we ask. Think about it. When we ask for the thorn to be taken away, we are actually asking for things to be better than the thorn. We want God to change things. Well, He does change things, just often times differently than the way that we ask.

A. We view our weakness as a glitch, but God views it as a gateway

We have all been "three-time pleaders" like Paul, begging God to remove the drain on our battery so we can feel "efficient" again. We want relief, but God provides a resource.

Remember the nation of Israel as they wandered for 40 years in the desert as one-by-one, everyone 20 years old and up at the time of the Exodus died. Every day God provided what they needed to survive: water, manna, meat. Each day it was only enough for that day and it was always enough, even on the day before the Sabbath when He would provide for 2 days, so they could follow the Sabbath rest He commanded.

Each time we feel the thorn of life pressing in, God is reminding us that He will give us

enough for that day. Each day He wants us to see His provision, despite the circumstances we might find ourselves in.

One of the most important statements I will share with you today is that when you feel that thorn of life pressing in, remember that...

B. God's power is not frustrated by our exhaustion; it is fulfilled (*teleitai* "perfected") by it

In the Greek, *teleitai* ("perfected" v. 9) doesn't just mean "improved." It means to be consummated or to reach its intended end. Like a Vacuum Tube in an old radio—the "nothingness" inside is the only environment where the signal can be amplified. Our 0% battery is the requirement for God's power to reach its full scale.

C. A "No" to our comfort is always a "Yes" to a greater demonstration of His glory

As **Charles Spurgeon** said: "What do I not owe to the hammer and the anvil, the fire and the file?"

When God denies our request for relief, He is protecting us from the poverty of self-sufficiency so we can experience the riches of His resource.

We can find shelter in the shadow of God's presence and power. However, there comes a point when ...

III. We Must Decide Between the Burden of Self or the Power of the Savior (v. 9b)

A. As long as we pretend we are full, we are disqualified from being filled

We spend so much energy trying to maintain the "Battery Myth"—pretending we have enough internal charge to handle our lives. But grace is not a supplement for our strength; it is the Power that occupies the space created by our inadequacy.

B. We accept the "Tent" of Christ ("dwell" *episkēnōsē*) the moment we stop hiding the truth of our own inadequacy

The word for "rest" means to "spread a tabernacle over." It's an "overshadowing" presence. You can either keep pushing against the burden of the boulder too big for

you to hardly move (the "thorn"), or you can find rest and peace in the tent of God.

Psalm 37:7 NASB95

⁷ Rest in the LORD and wait patiently for Him; Do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, Because of the man who carries out wicked schemes.

Matthew 11:28–30 NASB95

²⁸ "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS. ³⁰ "For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

Think of the WWII London Blitz: you could stay in your own house, trusting your own roof would hold up against the dropping bombs, or run to the Shelter made by someone else. Those who stayed in their own house were often crushed; those who admitted their house wasn't strong enough and fled to the shelters made by someone else were saved.

C. If we hide our weakness, we carry it alone; if we boast in our weakness, Christ covers it

This is the hinge of the spiritual life, the paradox. Do we want to stand in the heat of the day relying on our 2% battery, or step under the Tabernacle of the Almighty?

We choose the "Tent" by choosing to own the thorn.

That is the boast of the broken

IV. We Trade Our Fragility for His Fortitude (v. 10)

A. Spiritual maturity is finding pleasure ("content" hēdista) in our dependence rather than pride in our independence

Paul has become a "Pleasure-seeker" (hēdista shares a root with hedonism). He isn't a masochist who loves pain; he is a Presence-seeker who realized his weakness is the "Wi-Fi signal" for God's glory.

Like a Stained Glass Window, the most beautiful parts aren't the solid pieces, but the places where the glass is thinnest, letting the Light of the Source get through.

B. When we hit 0% battery, we finally become dangerous to the kingdom of darkness

When we stop protecting our reputation and stop trying to "look strong," the enemy

loses his leverage.

A person covered by the episkēnosē (the Tent) of Christ is a person who **cannot** be depleted by the world.

C. We don't need greater power; we need closer proximity

This is the final death of the "Battery Myth."

We aren't remote-controlled cars that run until our internal battery dies in the dirt. We are Bumper Cars. We have a pole that reaches up to a grid of power in the ceiling. We are limited in our range—we must stay under the grid—but we are infinite in our power because we are always touching the Source, despite the bumps and bangs along the way.

Conclusion & Series Final

As we move into the rest of 2026, may we learn increasingly to stop asking God for a "fuller battery" and start asking Him for a **"shorter cord."**

We are not self-sustaining units; we are dependent vessels.

Our weakness is not a defect to be cured; it is the portal through which the Almighty works.

May we be a people who stay so close to the Source that our weakness is no longer something we hide, but something we embrace. May it become that which we actually boast about; the very place where the world sees the manifest power of Jesus Christ resting upon us.

The Hudson Bay Mystery

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZeWLy7XZk60>

In the early 1900's there was a group of researchers who were studying the survival of indigenous tribes in the sub-arctic regions of the Hudson Bay. There is a parable from the time that they observed a specific hunter who was known for his ability to travel incredible distances across the frozen tundra in record time.

The researchers noticed he carried a small, heavy wooden box on his sled. They assumed it was a sophisticated survival kit or perhaps a collection of high-calorie rations. One day, during a blizzard, the hunter's sled broke down. He was stranded, miles from help, in temperatures that could freeze a man's lungs in minutes.

The researchers, watching from a distance, expected him to open the box to find a flare, a radio, or a heater. Instead, the man ignored the box, pulled out a long, heavy iron rod, and drove it deep through the ice into the frozen earth beneath. He then sat down, leaned against the rod, and waited.

When they finally rescued him, they asked, "What was in the box? What kind of technology saved you?"

The hunter laughed and said, "The box is empty. The rod is iron. I don't carry power in the box. I carry a connection using the rod. When the storm comes, I don't need a heater; I need to touch the earth. At 40 below zero the earth is warmer than the air. If I stay connected to the ground, I won't freeze. If I am to survive, my job isn't to carry the heat; it's to make sure I'm touching the Source of it."

The end:

For four weeks these sermons have been obsessed with what is in our 'box.' We've been checking our 'battery levels,' trying to figure out if we have enough internal heat to survive the storms of 2026. I mean, it's 6 degrees outside this morning. That might not be a storm, it might not be 40 below zero, but it is cold enough to freeze the living. Just like we yearn for escape from the cold, we've been praying, 'Lord, take away my thorn, fill my box! Give me more strength! Give me more resolve!'

But the Paradox of Power is this: **The box is meant to be empty.** Paul's 'thorn' was the iron rod that drove him deep into the grace of God. He didn't survive the shipwreck, the prison, or the persecution because he had a full battery; he survived because he was grounded in the Source.

Main Idea: God often refuses to remove the thorns that deplete our strength, because He knows that our utter weakness is the only environment where His perfect power can be fully displayed, for us to see and for others to see.

As we walk out of these doors today, may we stop checking our charge. May we stop panicking because we feel we are at 0%.

That emptiness, that weakness isn't a failure; it's the space where the rod goes to we can stay connected to the ground of God's grace.

Don't ask for a better battery. Ask for a deeper connection. Drive your weakness through the ice of this life and its thorns into the ground of His strength. Lean against the rod of your Savior and find warmth in the cold.

If we do, we all might just discover that when we have finally, truly run out of ourselves and our own power, we have finally and truly tapped into the Power of the Creator who runs the Universe.

You are not the source. You are the vessel. Live by the "Source," Jesus Christ.