

“ImPerfect Examples: Paul”
2 Corinthians 12:7-10 (CEB)
July 2, 2018

Rev. Dave Baldrige

Palm Harbor United Methodist Church, Palm Harbor, Florida

Oh, to be perfect! Teenagers want perfect complexion and yet most go through the pimple and acne stage. They use products to mask or clear up the skin problem.

Some men and women want perfect hair so they have it curled, cut and colored.

Some desire the perfect body so there are diets, fitness classes, exercises and health supplements.

Some always try to find that perfect job.

You know, skin blemishes will return, our hair will uncurl, turn that wonderful silvery color or even fall out. Our body---well they are not going to be perfect no matter what we do. There is no such thing as a perfect job as we all have good and bad aspects and good and bad days to our jobs.

We have a new bulletin/newsletter format. As noted on the front page I said this is our first edition and we will continue to update. This weekly newsletter is designed for you to take home. In a survey last fall we heard you say that we needed to strengthen communication. This is one of the ways we are doing that. That means you can read it during the sermon...and if I see you doing that...I will give you a frowny face stare, but the main thing is you take it home and read it and put things on your calendar---be informed. If I see you returning these bulletins/newsletters back in the lobby after the service...I might just have to gently slap your hand.

With this new format the church no longer pays for the paper, or the cost and wear and tear on our copy machine. It is done by an outside source in essence paid for by the ads you see. Some of you may want to take out an ad or tell someone you know about these ads. Now Jessica Petot has been working hard to make this come about and we had some specific requests to the company. But low and behold I get an email as I'm working on this sermon about ImPerfect examples where Jessica lets me know the bulletins are done and well...they are not in the format we requested. Sermon exhibit A---ImPerfect Example. They are imperfect. For example, we requested the ads not be on the back of the bulletin, yet there they are. And there are some other things Jessica was not pleased with. The company has been informed, and also apologized as they overlooked their own notes, and well it just reminds us as hard as we try there are going to be imperfections.

So, we have imperfections. Now when it comes to spouses---well we try to be perfect, but we know that is not the case except for one particular husband. Let me tell you the story.

Several men are in the changing room of a golf club. A cell phone on a bench rings and a man hits the hands-free speaker-function and begins to talk. Everyone else in the room stops to listen.

MAN: "Hello"

WOMAN: "Darling, it's me. Are you at the club?"

MAN: "Yes"

WOMAN: "I am at the shopping center and found this beautiful leather coat. It's only \$1,000. Is it OK if I buy it?"

MAN: "Sure...go ahead if you like it that much."

WOMAN: "I also stopped by the Mercedes dealership and saw the new models. I saw one I really liked."

MAN: "How much?"

WOMAN: "70,000"

MAN: "OK, but for that price I want it with all the options."

WOMAN: "Great! Oh, and one more thing ... The house I wanted last year is back on the market. They're asking 1.4.

MAN: "Well, then go ahead, but only give them an offer of 1.3. They will probably take it. If not, we can go the extra 50 thousand. It really is a pretty good price."

WOMAN: "OK. I'll see you later! I love you so much!!"

MAN: "Bye! I love you, too."

The man hangs up. The other men in the changing room are staring at him in astonishment, mouths wide open.... Wow what a perfect husband.

He smiles and asks: "Anyone know who this cell phone belongs to?"

Ah, perfection is what we may strive for, but in reality, we are imperfect.

The Apostle Paul wrote 13 of the 27 books of the New Testament. A man renown as such a great man of God. He was persistent, courageous, had integrity, compassion, Spirit-led, fearless, a servant heart, faithful, diligent, responsible, giving and a pray-er.

And yet he had a troubled and imperfect life. In 2 Corinthians 11, the chapter before what we read today we find these words beginning in verse 23. From the Message Bible.

2 Corinthians 11:23-27 The Message (MSG)

²³⁻²⁷ I've... been jailed more often, beaten up more times than I can count, and at death's door time after time. I've been flogged five times with the Jews' thirty-nine lashes, beaten by Roman rods three times, pummeled with rocks once. I've been shipwrecked three times and immersed in the open sea for a night and a day. In hard traveling year in and year out, I've had to ford rivers, fend off robbers, struggle with friends, struggle with foes. I've been at risk in the city, at risk in the country, endangered by desert sun and sea storm, and betrayed by those I thought were my brothers. I've known drudgery and hard labor, many a long and lonely night without sleep, many a missed meal, blasted by the cold, naked to the weather.

Indeed, Paul had his troubles!

We find in our scripture this morning he was given a thorn in the body---a thorn in the flesh. Scripture never identifies what that is. Were there emotional issues? Could it have been depression? What about certain spiritual struggles? Most believe it was probably a physical issue since it says thorn in the ‘body.’ Theories range from epilepsy, chronic eye problem (see Galatians 6:11), malaria and even migraines.

It is interesting that in verse 7 Paul says this thorn is a messenger from Satan to torment him so he won’t be conceited. Certainly, this keeps him humble.

We need to remember a proper type of humble. There is an old song from back in 1980 sung by Mac Davis that is entitled, “It’s Hard to be Humble.” Some of the lyrics are:

Oh Lord it's hard to be humble
 When you're perfect in every way
 I can't wait to look in the mirror
 Cause I get better looking each day
 To know me is to love me
 ...Oh Lord It's hard to be humble,
 But I'm doing the best that I can

Satan uses pride—we are called to be humble servants. Satan loves to torment with our imperfections. Satan wants to take your imperfections and have you be defeated. Satan wants to take your imperfections and make you feel down and depressed. Satan wants to take your imperfections to get you discouraged. But don’t you let him! Christ gives us the victory!!!!

Paul begs for the Lord’s help: **⁸I pleaded with the Lord three times for it to leave me alone.** Three times...strike 1, strike 2, strike 3, but it didn’t take him out of the ballgame. This great man Paul had imperfections that God would not take away. If God would have removed this “thorn” then maybe Paul would have been pain free, more effective in ministry, reach more people with the Gospel, glorify God even more. We don’t know why God did not remove this thorn from Paul. Likewise, we do not know why we have the illnesses, imperfections and struggles we have today. Instead of removing the thorn, God gave more grace.

Human weakness provides marvelous miraculous opportunities for God to show His divine power.

So, we have an example with Paul that he was not healed. But just as we used this verse last week we now know it’s context:

⁹He said to me, “My grace is enough for you, because power is made perfect in weakness.” So I’ll gladly spend my time bragging about my weaknesses so that Christ’s power can rest on me.

Jesus said, MY grace...not your strength. MY grace not your pride. MY grace not your complaining---MY grace because MY power is made perfect in your weakness.

Oh, to have this power to really know of his amazing Grace.

XXX8:05/9:30 Today we sang Amazing Grace originally with words written in 1779.

Don't mishear the lyrics. For example:

Misheard Lyrics: A maze of grapes, How sweet and round. ---No Amazing Grace how sweet the sound.

Misheard Lyrics: Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, That saved the rats like me.

No, no...Amazing grace, how sweet the sound That saved a wretch like me.

And NOT---Amazing grace that saved *witch* like me

Or as the mechanic who lost his tool said, Amazing grace that saved a wrench for me

Parents perhaps misheard the lyrics: Through many dangerous toy land scares I have already come.

Rather than: Through many dangers, toils, and snares I have already come.

"Amazing Grace"---I once was lost, not Amazing Grace I want soy sauce XXXXX

Oh, to know that God's amazing Grace is enough. It is endless. It is constant. It is present in the middle of our imperfections and troubles.

I don't know why good people suffer and have thorns. I don't know why bad things happen to good people.

Jesus reminds Paul with his thorn, with his imperfections that His grace is enough. Grace is the undeserved love of God. Our perfect Lord and Savior. Our Perfect God loves us.

Brennan Manning Franciscan priest said, "When the night is bad and my nerves are shattered and the waves break over the sides, Infinity speaks. God Almighty shares through His Son the depth of His feelings for me, His love flashes into my soul, and I am overtaken by mystery.... It is then I face a momentous decision.... I have two choices. I can escape below into skepticism and intellectualism, hanging on for dear life. Or, with radical amazement, I can stay on deck and boldly stand in surrendered faith to the truth of my belovedness, caught up in the reckless raging fury that they call the love of God."

Oh my---grace, love, made perfect in weakness. Manning also said this, "God not only loves me as I am, but also knows me as I am. Because of this I don't need to apply spiritual cosmetics to make myself presentable to Him. I can accept ownership of my poverty and powerlessness and neediness."

XXXXXX11:05

Reckless Love

Cory Asbury

Oh, the overwhelming, never-ending, reckless love of God
Oh, it chases me down, fights 'til I'm found, leaves the ninety-nine

I couldn't earn it, and I don't deserve it, still, You give Yourself away
Oh, the overwhelming, never-ending, reckless love of God,

You have been so, so good to me
When I felt no worth, You paid it all for me
You have been so, so kind to me

And oh, the overwhelming, never-ending, reckless love of God

There's no shadow You won't light up
Mountain You won't climb up
Coming after me
There's no wall You won't kick down
Lie You won't tear down
Coming after me
Oh, the overwhelming, never-ending, reckless love of God XXXXXXXX

Imperfect, thorns in the flesh, but grace in our ungracefulness, power in our powerlessness.
Amazing grace. Reckless love.

¹⁰ Therefore, I'm all right with weaknesses, insults, disasters, harassments, and stressful situations for the sake of Christ, because when I'm weak, then I'm strong.

We are imperfect. We are weak. Insults rock our perfect world. Disasters, globally, nationally and personally force into the reality of imperfections. There are harassments and stressful situations for the sake of Christ. HOWEVER-----When I'm weak, then I'm strong.

I'm not strong on my own account, but through that grace, through that love, through the power of Christ.

When I am weak, when I'm imperfect God gives me strength. We are reminded that His grace (His reckless love) overcomes and works with and in spite of our imperfections. He is with us.

Receive His presence. Receive His power. Receive His grace.