

SEEING IN THE DARK

2 CORINTHIANS 12:1-10

How do you face dark times? Notice I didn't ask how should you face dark times, but rather how do you? Pain and suffering are universal, but for the Christian, they are valuable and even beneficial. Today we take a look at the apostle Paul's own personal experience. He had a very positive episode followed by a very negative one. It rattled him at first, but eventually he learned a lesson that lifted him to a place where he could face the darkness with confidence and grace.

1. God blesses us with _____ (vs. 1-4).

2. God balances us with _____ (vs. 7-8).

Job 2:10 (NLT) "Should we accept only good things from the hand of God and never anything bad?"

3. God benefits us with _____ (vs. 9-10).

Matthew 5:45 (NLT) For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike.

2 Corinthians 1:3-5 (NLT) All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is our merciful Father and the source of all comfort. ⁴He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When they are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us. ⁵For the more we suffer for Christ, the more God will shower us with his comfort through Christ.

*** Your trials aren't random; they're opportunities to apply God's grace repeatedly until something beautiful forms in your character.**

Scripture References (In order of use): Job 2:10; Matthew 5:45; 2 Corinthians 1:3-5
Referenced Works: 2 Corinthians—Power in Weakness (Kent Hughes); Addresses on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians (H. A. Ironside); The Letters to the Corinthians (William Barclay); Paul's Letters to a Troubled Church: I and II Corinthians (Bob Utley)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Share about a time when something that seemed like a disaster at first turned out to have unexpected benefits later.
2. Read 2 Corinthians 12:1-10. Is there anything from the sermon you would like to discuss?
3. Paul had an incredible vision of heaven but kept it secret for 14 years. Why do you think he waited so long to share it? What does this teach us about humility and spiritual experiences?
4. Why do you think God chose not to reveal exactly what Paul's "thorn" was? How might this ambiguity actually be helpful for believers across different circumstances?
5. Patrick said that "No" can be an answer to prayer. How does this challenge our typical understanding of answered prayer? Can you think of a time when God's "no" proved to be more loving than a "yes" would have been?
6. Without oversharing, can you identify a persistent difficulty in your life that God hasn't removed despite prayer? How has your perspective on this challenge changed over time?
7. Paul learned that God's grace was sufficient for him. What does "sufficient grace" look like practically? How do we access it when we're in the midst of difficulty?
8. Patrick mentioned three ways people typically respond to troubles: bitter, battered, or better. Which response do you tend toward naturally? What helps you move toward becoming "better"?
9. According to 2 Corinthians 1:3-5, we receive comfort so we can comfort others. Who in your life might need the comfort that only someone who has walked through difficulty can provide?

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

- **Comfort Someone:** Think of someone going through a trial similar to one you've experienced. Reach out to them this week with encouragement, sharing how God's grace sustained you (without minimizing their pain).
- **Practice Gratitude in Difficulty:** Each day this week, write down one way you've seen God's grace at work in the midst of a current challenge. Share your list with the group next time.

DAILY DEVOTIONS

Day 1: When Everything Burns Down

Reading: Job 1:13-22

Like the shipwrecked man whose hut burned to the ground, Job lost everything in a single day. Yet his response reveals a profound truth: sometimes what we perceive as total loss becomes the very thing God uses for our rescue. The smoke from that burning hut brought salvation. Job's declaration, "Should we accept only good things from the hand of God and never anything bad?" challenges our entitled expectations. Today, consider what "burning hut" in your life might actually be a smoke signal God is using for a greater purpose. Our disasters don't surprise God; He often uses them as the very means of our deliverance. What looks like an ending may be the beginning of your rescue.

Day 2: The Visions We Cannot Share

Reading: 2 Corinthians 12:1-6

Paul experienced heaven itself, yet waited fourteen years to mention it, and even then refused to elaborate. Why? Because God's greatest gifts aren't for public consumption or personal pride. Paul understood that intimacy with God isn't a platform for self-promotion. In our social media age, we're conditioned to broadcast every experience immediately. But some of God's most precious revelations are meant to humble us privately rather than elevate us publicly. The depth of your relationship with God isn't measured by what you can tell others, but by how it transforms who you are when no one is watching. What has God shown you that's meant to change you, not promote you?

Day 3: The Stake That Keeps Us Grounded

Reading: 2 Corinthians 12:7-9

Paul's "stake in the flesh" wasn't a minor inconvenience—the word means something used to impale in battle. God allowed severe affliction to prevent severe pride. This is uncomfortable theology: God sometimes permits pain to protect us from something worse—spiritual arrogance that would destroy our effectiveness. Paul begged three times for removal, then stopped. He discovered that persistent prayer sometimes leads not to changed circumstances, but to changed perspective. The thorn remained, but Paul's understanding transformed. What persistent pain in your life might God be using to keep you dependent on Him? Perhaps the real danger isn't the thorn itself, but what you'd become without it.

Day 4: Sufficient Grace for Insufficient Strength

Reading: 2 Corinthians 12:9-10; Philippians 4:10-13

"My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness." This is God's economy turned upside down from worldly thinking. We spend our lives accumulating strength, resources, and self-sufficiency, while God says His power flows most freely through our insufficiency. Paul moved from begging for healing to boasting in weakness—not because he enjoyed pain, but because he discovered something better than relief: the manifest presence of Christ's power. When you are weak, then you are strong. This isn't positive thinking; it's supernatural reality. Where you feel most inadequate today, God's grace is most available. Stop asking Him to remove your weakness and start asking Him to fill it with His strength.

Day 5: Pearls From Irritation

Reading: 2 Corinthians 1:3-11; Romans 5:1-5

A pearl forms through persistent irritation met with persistent response. The oyster doesn't reject the sand; it covers it repeatedly until something valuable emerges. Your trials aren't random; they're opportunities to apply God's grace repeatedly until something beautiful forms in your character. But here's the key: you're not creating pearls for yourself alone. God comforts you in trouble so you can comfort others. Your suffering qualifies you to minister in ways your strengths never could. Will you become bitter, battered, or better? The choice isn't about your circumstances, but your response to them. The greater the irritation, the greater the potential value. What pearl is God forming in your life through persistent difficulty met with persistent grace?

DEACONS ON CALL

Royce Blair and David Barks

WEEKLY EVENTS

- **WORSHIP:** Sundays at 9:45 AM
- **SMALL GROUPS:** Sundays at 11 AM
- **DEEP DIVE:** Wednesdays at Noon and 6:45 PM
- **FIRST KIDS:** Wednesdays at 5:30 PM
- **FIRST YOUTH:** Wednesdays - MS 5:30 PM; HS 6:45 PM

