



Grace Land

2 Corinthians 12:9-10 NIV

But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.

Have You Ever Felt Like You Were Wasting Your Time?

One of the most memorable family vacations I took was our camping trip to Sequoia National Park. It was to last three weeks up in the Sierra Nevada Mountains. We took a detour however as along the way, the engine on our Volkswagen Bus threw a rod and we had to stop in Fresno to replace the engine. Much later in life I discovered that my dad didn't have the money to have the work done so we had to wait until my grandmother could wire him the money. It took four days before we could leave and what I remember was how blazing hot it was in Fresno. You could have fried eggs on the sidewalk. We stayed in a hotel and swam in the pool and for the kids it was great. I am sure it wasn't very fun though for my dad and probably not for my mom either. We still stayed over two weeks in Sequoia Park and hiked and had campfires and swam in the river but what I remember most about the trip was that stay in Fresno. My mom, who was Christian, may have asked God several times why He let our car break down and probably prayed for help with the finances. It was of course the worst case scenario with the car. There isn't anything much more expensive than having to replace an engine and being stuck in Fresno in the summer was certainly not in my dad's plan for having a great vacation.

If you didn't believe in God, then everything is random and absurd. Life is a probability chart. You would never ask why certain things happen, they just do and there is no point analyzing them. Yet for any person who is convinced that the Lord oversees the heavens and the earth and manages what happens, the wonder of why becomes meaningful. Why am I here? Why did this take place? Why am I facing this? Why are there so many roadblocks, difficulties? Why did this work and why am I suddenly able to figure out this challenge? Why becomes pertinent in a universe that has God in it and just like my mom and maybe even my dad wondered why we all got stuck in Fresno, you might also be asking why about something that is important to you! Why is my life going this way and what am I supposed to do about it?

David, the second king of the nation of Israel lived a fascinating life. He was at times magnificently successful and other times a colossal failure. He was a pretty bad father and husband and a phenomenal military strategist. He was a magnificent leader and at the same time painfully inadequate. Much of who he became was shaped over the course of nearly ten years. During that time, David was being hunted by the king of Israel, Saul. When David was only eighteen, he became a pariah to Saul, hated for his success and popularity. Did David make mistakes early when he still was a friend of the king? Perhaps! Maybe he was a bit too "braggy". Maybe he did not honor the king enough or defer to him with sufficient humility. It

might have been that David got a little full of himself, having been anointed by the prophet Samuel as the next king of Israel.

We can't say though that David created the conflict between himself and Saul. Most of it was due to Saul's irrational resentment of David and his own insecurities. But if we are certain, as David himself was, that God rules over the universe, then we have to wonder why God let David have such a difficult life. Was he being punished? Why did he have to hide out in the desert for more than a decade, living in caves and beside mountains, fearing for his life on a daily basis? There is a Psalm that is attributed to him during this time when David had to escape his home because Saul had sent soldiers to kill him. **See how they lie in wait for me! Fierce men conspire against me for no offense or sin of mine, O Lord. I have done no wrong, yet they are ready to attack me. Arise to help me; look on my plight!** (Psalm 59:3-4 NIV) What could David possibly have done that was so bad that God let him to live like a mouse trapped in the kitchen as the cat prowled about? He did not have enough allies to fight Saul and the king was too irrational to see that David was of use to him and his cause. Why didn't God do something to stop all this madness? Why wouldn't He turn David's life around and save him from his enemy? David seemed to be a prayerful person, someone who relied on God constantly. Why didn't God take away David's hardship?

The Apostle Paul is another person in the Bible whose circumstances seemed unexplainable. He was accused by the Hebrew leaders in Jerusalem of promoting anti-Jewish sentiment in the Roman Empire and for violating the Temple laws by bringing Greeks into the court of the Jews. The charges were never proven and although the Roman governor had the authority to acquit him, they did nothing and left him in prison for two years. Finally Paul appealed as a Roman citizen to be tried in Rome and so he was delivered to Caesar. What good was it for Paul to be left in jail for two years? What had he done to deserve such treatment? The question arises, "Why didn't God intervene?" It would have been easy for the Lord to get Paul released so the Apostle could continue his missionary work and the spread of the Gospel but He didn't. Such cases like this are easy to find throughout the Bible and we know of similar circumstances ourselves. Why does God seem so heartless at times? Why is He so "careless" with His people?

Famously, Paul had something that troubled him greatly and he prayed for God to take it away from him. **To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me.** (2 Corinthians 12:7-8 NIV) If there was ever a fascinating mystery in Scripture, this would be it. What was this "thorn in my flesh"? There is no telling. Whatever it was, it certainly caused Paul a great amount of anguish because he said it tormented him. God's response was mystifying. **But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."** (2 Corinthians 12:9 NIV) He refused to intervene. But there is an important detail in the Lord's reply that is critical for those who want to understand God's ways with us.

Paul's response helps us see exactly what the Lord is doing with all of us who struggle with the long periods of time when it seems like God has forgotten about us. **Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.** (2 Corinthians 12:9 NIV) He says he will boast about his weaknesses which seems strange. Why would anyone do that? We must realize though that "boast" here has more the idea of rejoicing in or exulting in what has happened. In other words, Paul is happy to have had the weaknesses given him because they opened the way for Christ's power to become a part of him. Imagine a flask that can't be filled because you don't take the lid off it. You have the most wonderful and lovely drink to fill it but you can't because the mouth of the flask is covered. Your weaknesses open the lid so that God can pour His strength into you. Without weaknesses, without the sort of things that make you cry out for God to stop them, the supernatural power of God can't get into you. When God tells you "no, I won't end this" it seems cruel and uncaring but there is a miracle that is taking place and the Lord doesn't want you to lose it.

Consider that important word “grace” found in God’s reply. “My grace is sufficient for you...” Grace is a technical term in the New Testament labeling God’s work of taking out of us sin and the damage it has caused us. When God makes you wait and He keeps you in a difficult spot, one that makes you wince, He does so for two reasons. One, He is taking out of you the sin that plagues you. He is removing like a surgeon the hurt it has brought you so that you are healed psychologically and emotionally. He is making you healthy within. Two, He is pouring His strength in you so you will become tough, sturdy, robust like that house Jesus talked about that stands when the storms come. You are taking in a fresh new measure of God each time trouble comes and it will be a great joy to you when you see how wonderfully God has worked Himself in you. He is empowering you with supernatural strength and you will be an inspiration to others as they see what God has done in you.

It takes faith to believe that God is good and His love is still there for you when you are facing a difficult and painful period in your life. Those times call for great faith in God and that is not easy to maintain. Perhaps you will need another Christian to stand by you and support you when God is reworking you as you suffer through your tough trial. He will give that friend to you if you ask for one but the person He selects might not be who you expected. Remember, it is your weakness that opens the door for God to transform you and make you strong by giving you His strength! God makes a promise to you in Isaiah 40: 31. Literally it reads, **And those enduring the wait of the Lord will upgrade strength. They will rise up on wings as eagles. They will run and they will not grow weary, they will proceed and they will not become exhausted.** There is an interesting word used in Isaiah 40:31. It is the Hebrew verb Kavah. It means to wait, to endure, to look for eagerly. The verse reminds us that those who endure the long wait with longing for God will gain strength from Him, a supernatural strength! When it gets rough and it feels like you will snap, God’s strength will take over and you will have more of God in you and less of your old weariness and brokenness. Sin will be conquered as God makes His home in you.