

# Weekly Devotional

For the week of February 21, 2010



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## We are a listening church

*Being inspired by Christ as we hear the Bible speak in its historical context*

### Bible Background

Paul, the author of this week's scripture from 2 Corinthians, had a couple of problems he refers to in this passage. First is his outward struggle: because of his work as a missionary and evangelist, Paul is testifying to the good news about Jesus in front of crowds almost every day. Many people who hear Paul speaking are accusing him of being self-absorbed and egotistical, because he is telling the story of his conversion experience over and over again.

Immediately before the scripture from today, Paul responds to his critics in three ways. First, he admits that he has been bragging about himself (though he does blame the crowds for egging him on). Why Paul and the crowds have been both a part of this call-and-response of bragging isn't clear, because the only piece of information we have about what Paul looked like says that he was short, bald, had crooked thighs, was hollow-eyed, and had a crooked nose. Whatever they were getting all worked up about, it wasn't his looks.

Paul's second response to his critics is to pledge to start lifting up the stories of other Christians, and not just himself anymore. Finally, Paul writes that from now on, he will only be boasting about his weaknesses. Boasting about his weaknesses?!?

Paul identifies that his inward struggle is some kind of physical weakness or medical condition. Scholars have debated to exactly what this condition might have been, but whatever it was, Paul lived with it for the rest of his life. What is remarkable here is that Paul associates the grace of God with his condition: *"I was given the gift of a handicap to keep me in constant touch with my limitations...At first I didn't think of it as a gift, and begged God to remove it. Three times I did that, and then he told me, my grace is enough; it's all you need. My strength comes into its own in your weakness."*

Throughout history, Christians have looked to Paul's example as a way for them to make sense of their struggles, and to see God at work through their problems. No group has taken this to heart more than Alcoholics Anonymous. In these kinds of 12-step programs, the first steps are to 1) admit we are powerless, and 2) believe that only a higher power can restore us to sanity.

### Questions for reflection

How else could Paul have responded to his condition?  
What affect do you think that would have had on his ministry?

## We are a learning church

*Learning to love and serve with all people by drawing upon the resources of our culture, the arts, and the stories of our own lives*

### Quotes for the week

"The greatest weakness of all is the great fear of appearing weak."  
(Jacques Benigne Bossuet)

"The people who God uses to teach a new spiritual way often are not recognized religious leaders but those who appear to be ordinary men and women: carpenters like Jesus, tent-makers like Paul, teachers of rhetoric like Augustine, soldiers like Ignatius Loyola, or students of literature like Thomas Merton. Their methods have the smell of earth and the sights and sounds of real life about them."  
(J. Keith Miller, *A Hunger For Healing: The Twelve Steps as a Classic Model for Christian Spiritual Growth*)

"I kept looking for books to give people that described my new experience of faith. Most of the contemporary books I found at that time said, in effect, 'If you commit your life to Jesus Christ, your problems will disappear.' But my experience was that I got a whole new set of problems. Things that hadn't been issues at all before had to be considered now."  
(J. Keith Miller, *A Hunger For Healing*)

"Just cause you got the monkey off your back doesn't mean the circus has left town." (George Carlin)

"No personal calamity is so crushing that something true and great can't be made of it." (Bill W., founder of A.A.)

### Question for reflection

What comes to mind when you think of God saying this phrase? *"My grace is enough; it's all you need. My strength comes into its own in your weakness."*

# Scriptures

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## First reading: **2 Corinthians 12:7-10**

*From: The Message*

Because of the extravagance of those revelations, and so I wouldn't get a big head, I was given the gift of a handicap to keep me in constant touch with my limitations. Satan's angel did his best to get me down; what he in fact did was push me to my knees. No danger then of walking around high and mighty! At first I didn't think of it as a gift, and begged God to remove it. Three times I did that, and then he told me,

My grace is enough; it's all you need.  
My strength comes into its own in your weakness.

Once I heard that, I was glad to let it happen. I quit focusing on the handicap and began appreciating the gift. It was a case of Christ's strength moving in on my weakness. Now I take limitations in stride, and with good cheer, these limitations that cut me down to size—abuse, accidents, opposition, bad breaks. I just let Christ take over! And so the weaker I get, the stronger I become.

## Gospel: **Luke 4:1-13**

*From: The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)*

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished.

The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread." Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.'"

Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And the devil said to him, "To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours." Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'"

Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'" Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.