

Intro *Enough is enough.* I don't know if I can take it anymore. Every day is a grind. Every day is another battle. Every day brings more struggles, and every day brings more stress. *Enough is enough.* Just when I think I'm going to have some free time to relax, then I find myself even more busy than before. Just when I think all the problems are gone, then a new one pops up out of nowhere. Just when I feel comfortable and at peace, then someone else gets sick or dies. *Enough is enough.*

I'm becoming more old and out of shape every day. I'm too busy to do anything but work. I worry about the budget on a daily basis (not just mine but the church and school's, too). I frequently can't sleep because my mind won't stop racing with regrets or concerns or ideas for the church and school. *Enough is enough.*

Then there is this sinful nature that I live with. Talk about battles! Talk about struggles! I know the things God wants me to do be doing. Yet somehow I still end up not doing them. I know the things God doesn't want me to be doing. Yet somehow I still end up doing them. Everywhere I turn there's sin. You can hardly read a magazine or watch TV without some sort of impurity being shoved in your face. How am I supposed to fight off those temptations every single day? How am I supposed to resist those sins every single time? Just when I feel good about myself and my spiritual life, then Satan attacks and I fall into sin all over again! *Enough is enough!*

How about you? Have you had enough? Have you had it with family problems? Are you just tired and worn out from the things you have had to deal with in the last few months or year? Are you sick of worrying about money so much? When will you be able to live comfortably? When will you be able stop worrying about bills? Have you been beaten up by tragedies? Sicknesses? Surgeries? Deaths? Are you exhausted from battling your sinful nature? When will you kick that spiritual laziness? When will you beat that bad habit? When will you put down that pet sin? *Enough is enough, right?*

I. God's own apostle, named Paul, would certainly empathize and sympathize. He endured a lot. By the time Paul wrote his two letters to the Corinthians (which likely were sent just a few months apart), he had been through more than we could imagine. In most cities he was chased out of town and persecuted by the Jews. In Lystra he was dragged out of the city and stoned. (Imagine being stoned! These weren't little bits of pea gravel they were firing at him! They would have hurled sizeable stones and rocks at him to crush his bones and his skull!). In Philippi he was stripped, beaten, and severely flogged. (Flogging involved bits of shards of bone or metal being attached to the ends of a multi-pronged whip. It was meant to tear your flesh apart. Up to this point, Paul had received the maximum 39 lashings five

times!) Then they tossed him into prison there in Philippi. In Athens he was laughed at by the "brilliant philosophers" of the city. And in Ephesus the entire city broke into a riot over his preaching. Just before these words in chapter 12 Paul mentions that he was beaten with a rod three times, he was shipwrecked three times (and once spent a whole day in open sea). At times he went hungry and unclothed. He had been threatened by his own people, by Gentiles, by bandits, and more. We could easily hear Paul saying *Enough is enough!*

That wasn't the end of it though. We pick up in 2 Corinthians 12 with our second lesson today: **"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."**

There is a lot of speculation about what exactly this thorn was. We know it was something he continually suffered from. We know Satan used it as a "messenger"—as an obstacle supposed to hinder Paul in his preaching. Some think it might have been recurring malaria, which may be alluded to in Galatians and Acts in the Bible. Perhaps it was arthritis setting in from all the beatings? Others think it may have been very poor eyesight, which Paul may also suggest in other letters. Whatever it was, it tormented Paul—it was so bad that he could only compare it to a thorn being lodged in the flesh. So he pleaded with the Lord to remove it.

Certainly Paul was a man that prayed continually. He likely brought all kinds of requests to God in prayer quite frequently. But we surely get the impression that this was a different kind of request Paul prayed. He begged. He beseeched. He called out. He pleaded. What might that prayer have sounded like? "Lord! Take this ailment away! Restore my health! Why have you let me suffer like this? I have endured so much! This "thorn" is hindering my preaching! Lord, *enough is enough!*"?

But Paul reflects upon his thoughts and prayers as he writes to these Corinthians, and he sounds like a man who has learned from his troubles. Or rather, he had learned *about* his troubles. Listen again to that first line sentence: **"To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh."** Paul understood one of the reasons God allowed him to suffer—to keep him from being conceited. It wouldn't have been hard for him to boast and brag. He was of the chosen people, the Israelites, and an actual descendant of Abraham. He was trained as a Pharisee. Later, Jesus himself appeared to Paul and handpicked him to be an apostle. He had seen visions and received revelations from God. He was an inspired Bible writer. He wrote some of the most theological and beautiful and memorable words of the New Testament. How easily Paul could have boasted! How easily he could have looked down

his nose at the insignificant and unimportant people of the world! But to keep him from being conceited he was given this thorn in the flesh.

Lesson learned. Have you ever become conceited before? “I’ve been a Christian my whole life. I’ve grown up with and known this stuff forever.” “I can’t believe that person calls himself a Christian. I am way better than that person.” “Can you believe what she did? How awful.” “I’m so great. Look at what I’ve accomplished. Look at what I’ve made. Look at what I’ve done.” Could there be a “thorn in your flesh” right now with which God is humbling you and bringing you back to reality?

Maybe it’s not conceit. Maybe your struggle is apathy. “Ah, church. It’s good, but I don’t need to go *all* the time.” “I try to read my Bible when I have time.” “I pray when I remember.” “If I have money left after all my bills and fun stuff, then I give a little to the church.” Could there be a “thorn in your flesh” right now with which God is reminding you what is most important in your life? Could God be using a “thorn” right now to teach you to reprioritize your life?

In his infinite wisdom, God knows just the right ways to bring us back to reality. God knows just the right ways to give us wake up calls. God knows just the right way to get us to stop worshiping ourselves and our own lives, to humble us, and to lead us to worship him. We might be saying, “*Enough is enough*,” but it is God who knows what is best and knows when we have had enough. The apostle Paul knew that, and we can have faith in that, too.

II. We might imagine there could have been a point in time where Paul would still have been quite frustrated. After all, how often can one person be humbled? Perhaps in his pleading with the Lord he could have prayed, “Lord, I get it. I’m humbled now. I’ve been poor and needy. I’ve been beaten, shipwrecked, flogged, and stoned. I can’t see well and I keep getting malaria. I get it Lord. I’m humble. But now *enough is enough!*”

Whatever his prayers sounded like, Paul finally shares with us what God’s response was in verse nine: “**But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’**” God’s answer? “Paul, you have all that you need because you have my grace.” This apostle learned the really hard way that the most important thing in life is not physical health or family or friends or money or Paul’s skill in writing or his ability to preach and do mission work. The most important thing in Paul’s life was God’s undeserved love for him.

God is such an amazing God. He is unlike any other god which other religions have made up. The true God is so different because he has shown his power in weakness. A baby lying in a manger doesn’t look very powerful. A carpenter’s son rejected by his own people doesn’t look very powerful. A “king” riding on a donkey doesn’t look very powerful. A man beaten and bruised and mocked and spit upon and dripping with blood doesn’t look very

powerful. A “savior” nailed to a cross and lying in a tomb doesn’t look very powerful. But God’s power is made perfect in weakness. Jesus’ humble life and death may have looked weak. Yet there has never been anything more powerful. Who else has lived a perfect life on behalf of everyone else? Who else has resisted temptation and sin? Who else has had to carry the sin of the world? Who else has gone toe-to-toe with Satan and won? Who else has risen from the dead never to die again? Jesus looks so weak! “What good is a God who dies on a cross?” the world thinks. But through this supposed weakness, God’s power was made perfect. More importantly, through this supposed weakness, God’s grace was made perfect. For through a humble life and death, Jesus won for us forgiveness, salvation, and life in heaven.

And that, my friends, is enough. There is nothing more that we could ever want. There is nothing more that we would ever need. When we have family problems, when we are struggling with money, when we are sick and tired of trials and troubles, when we are weary from battling sin, when we are worn out from living in this world, God comes to us with his loving embrace and says, “**My grace is sufficient for you.**”

Indeed, what does anything else matter? So what if we suffer? So what if we have trials and troubles? So what if there are problems and complications in life? So what if we are weak? In all these things we are only reminded whom to rely on. Listen to Paul in verse nine: “**Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in my weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.**” You do have a reason to brag. You do have a reason to boast in this world. In fact, go ahead and tell everyone you know—You’re weak, but Christ has made you strong by making you his child!

Concl. Have you gone through some difficult times lately? Have you shed a few tears recently? Have you had your share of heartache and headache? Have you been tired and worn out? Have you had enough? Well you sure have! *Enough is enough*, and you *have* had enough. You have God’s grace, and God’s grace is all you need. Thanks be to God for giving us enough!

AMEN