

Uzziah and the Advantage of Weakness

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[0:00] Let's turn in our Bibles today to the Old Testament. 2 Chronicles 26. 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, and then 1 and 2 Chronicles.

! And we're in 2 Chronicles 26. We'll read the entire chapter in your hearing.

And please stand together with me for this reading from God's Word. 2 Chronicles 26. Then all the people of Judah took Uzziah, who was 16 years old, and made him king in place of his father Amaziah.

He was the one who rebuilt Elath and restored it to Judah after Amaziah rested with his fathers.

Uzziah was 16 years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem 52 years.

His mother's name was Jechaliah. She was from Jerusalem. He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, just as his father Amaziah had done. He sought God during the days of Zechariah, who instructed him in the fear of God.

[1:10] As long as he sought the Lord, God gave him success. He went to war against the Philistines and broke down the walls of Gath, Jabneh, and Ashdod. He then rebuilt towns near Ashdod and elsewhere among the Philistines.

God helped him against the Philistines and against the Arabs who lived in Gurbaal and against the Ammonites. The Ammonites brought tribute to Uzziah, and his fame spread as far as the border of Egypt because he had become very powerful.

Uzziah built towers in Jerusalem at the corner gate, at the valley gate, and at the angle of the wall, and he fortified them. He also built towers in the desert and dug many cisterns because he had much livestock in the foothills and in the plain.

He had people working in his fields and vineyards in the hills and in the fertile lands, for he loved the soil. Uzziah had a well-trained army, ready to go out by divisions according to their numbers, as mustered by Jael, the secretary, and Maesai, the officer, under the direction of Hananiah, one of the royal officials.

The total number of family leaders over the fighting men was 2,600. Under their command was an army of 307,500 men, trained for war, a powerful force to support the king and his enemies.

[2:23] Against his enemies. Uzziah provided shields, spears, helmets, coats of armor, bows, and sling stones for the entire army.

In Jerusalem, he made machines designed by skillful men for use on the towers and on the corner defenses to shoot arrows and hurl large stones. His fame spread far and wide, for he was greatly helped until he became powerful.

But after Uzziah became powerful, his pride led to his downfall. He was unfaithful to the Lord his God and entered the temple of the Lord to burn incense on the altar of incense.

Azariah, the priest, with 80 other courageous priests of the Lord, followed him in. They confronted him and said, It is not right for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to the Lord.

That is for the priests, the descendants of Aaron, who have been consecrated to burn incense.

Leave the sanctuary, for you have been unfaithful, and you will not be honored by the Lord God.

Uzziah, who had a censer in his hand, ready to burn incense, became angry.

[3:28] While he was raging at the priests in their presence, before the incense altar in the Lord's temple, leprosy broke out on his forehead. When Azariah, the chief priest, and all the other priests looked at him, they saw that he had leprosy on his forehead, so they hurried him out.

Indeed, he himself was eager to leave because the Lord had afflicted him. King Uzziah had leprosy until the day he died. He lived in a separate house, leprous, and excluded from the temple of the Lord.

Joth and his son had charge of the palace and governed the people of the land. The other events of Uzziah's reign from beginning to end are recorded by the prophet Isaiah, son of Amoz. Uzziah rested with his fathers and was buried near them in a field for burial that belonged to the kings. For people said he had leprosy, and Joth and his son succeeded him as king. I invite you to open with me to 2 Chronicles chapter 26.

This morning we are taking something of a break from our usual exposition in the book of James, but our reason for doing so is not at all unrelated to the book of James.

[4:40] I have been struck with the importance of James chapter 4, verses 5 and 6. Not only their importance to the whole book of James, but their importance to the whole Christian life.

After talking about our evil desires and talking extensively about our many trials and temptations and failures, James comes to this, where he says, But God gives us more grace.

That's central to the book of James. That's central to living the Christian life. He gives us what we don't deserve, grace. He gives us power to live the Christian life.

But then right away he reminds us who he gives grace to. It's the humble. It's for this reason that scripture says, God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.

It's a humility, as he opens it up, that draws near to God. God confesses sin and weakness and brings our needs before him.

[5:55] And it's to the humble who ask that he gives generously without finding fault. Now, about 800 years before James, there lived a king whose life clearly illustrated these very truths that James speaks of.

That God opposes the proud, but that he gives grace to the humble. That those who humble themselves before him, he will lift them up.

His name is Uzziah. And at age 16, he's made king of Judah in place of his father. And he reigns for the long reign of 52 years.

And basically, he did what was right in the eyes of the Lord. But the story of his life is divided into two parts. There were his humble years and his proud years.

And both parts of his life are introduced by a key phrase that sums up that period of his life.

[7:03] We start with part one, his humble years. And the key phrase that sums up this period of his life is found at the end of verse five. As long as he sought the Lord, God gave him success.

What's going on in the life of Uzziah? Just this. As long as he sought the Lord, God gave him success. Now, when young Uzziah came to the throne, the kingdom was in shambles.

Spiritually, it was at a low point. His father Amaziah, we read, had led the nation into the worship of the gods of Edom. And this brought God's judgment upon the whole nation.

So the whole nation was a mess. Militarily, the army was in disarray, having been soundly defeated by the northern kingdom of Israel. There was a 600 foot section of the wall of Jerusalem that was broken down, leaving the city open and exposed to attack.

Economically, all the wealth of the temple, its gold and silver and other valuables, along with all the wealth of the palace, had been plundered by the enemy.

[8:20] And so now here he is, a 16 year old boy with a crown on his head, with all eyes on him, expecting him to fix the problems.

What is he to do? Well, he sought the Lord. He prayed. It's a sense of our need that makes us humbly seek the Lord for help.

Prayer is the language of humble dependence on God. Prayer says, I can't manage this, God, but you can and you can give me grace to manage this.

Now give me more grace, more grace, Lord. You see, Uzziah felt like he was in over his head. And indeed he was.

His problems were bigger than he could fix. He knew he needed divine resources, so he went knocking on heaven's door, humbly seeking the Lord in prayer.

[9:23] He sought his help and blessing in all that he attempted. He sought his wisdom and strength. He sought his smile and his favor. His humble years are marked by seeking the Lord in prayer.

And as long as he sought the Lord, God gave him success. So these years are marked by seeking the Lord and they're also marked by success.

And there's a direct connection between the two, as the verse says. But the Lord gave success. And the details of the success are spelled out in the first half of this chapter.

He sought the Lord in his military campaigns. And so the Lord gave him help against his enemies. Victory in battle against the Philistines, their inveterate enemies. Those strong enemies right next door to them. Victories tearing down strong cities of the Philistines. [10:25] Victories against the Arabs, the Munites. The Ammonites even brought him tribute and his fame spread all the way to Egypt. He had restored the military to a well-trained and well-armed, powerful army of over 300,000 fighting men.

He strengthened and fortified Jerusalem. He rebuilt that fallen section of the wall and built towers and mounted these weapons, these machines of war that would shoot arrows and hurl large stones in defending Jerusalem.

And then we're told that he undertook building projects. He built towns among the Philistines, probably guarding the trade route that would enable him to increase in wealth, in the nation's wealth, securing those important trade routes by building towers in the deserts. In this connection, he rebuilt the port city of Elath and restored it to Judah. He had great agricultural projects that proved fruitful.

We're told he loved the soil. And so he had many workers working fields and vineyards. He dug cisterns, many of them, to water his great herds of livestock.

[11:52] These are all signs of increased wealth. This is like saying he had money in the bank. Increased flocks and fields. And all of this meant that his fame spread far and wide.

Everybody was talking about Uzziah. Uzziah, king of Judah and all his sensational accomplishments. The king who took the world by storm.

And the inspired chronicler wants us to know that every military victory, every thriving agricultural and building project, every economic gain was due to one thing.

That he was greatly helped by the Lord. Verses 7 and 15 tell us. And indeed, as long as he sought the Lord, God gave him success.

Why was he succeeding? Why was the nation so well off now under his hand? Because God gave him success. That's key to all that you read of about his success.

[13:03] God is sending a clear signal to all who read Uzziah's story. Humble yourselves before the Lord and he will lift you up.

He gives grace to the humble who seek him. And so a man in need who refuses to live in prayerless self-reliance, but humbly prays, casting himself upon the Lord, will find all the wisdom, all the help, all the grace he needs.

But now there were hints dropped along the way that make us wonder about what the last chapters of Uzziah's life might be. Perhaps you caught them as Pastor Aaron read.

Verse 5 says that he sought God during the days of Zechariah. That was his spiritual advisor who instructed him in the fear of the Lord.

And he sought God during the days of Zechariah. But we wonder, what about when Zechariah was gone? Would he seek the Lord then? And verse 5 goes on to say, as long as he sought the Lord, God gave him success.

[14:17] But there's almost an ominous ring to it, isn't there? How long did he seek the Lord? Was there a time in his life where he quit seeking the Lord? And then, if you've read chapter 23 through 25, just before chapter 26, there's the history of his father and his grandfather, the two previous kings.

His father, Amaziah, had started out well, but it ended poorly. It slipped into sin and came under the judgment of God.

And his father, King Joash, before him had done the same. And so we see this track record and we wonder, boy, it's encouraging to see Uzziah seeking the Lord.

But we wonder, will he follow in the train of his father and grandfathers before him? With a tragic ending to his life. Well, verse 15 ends the humble part of his life.

It says he was greatly helped until he became powerful. And then verse 16 gives us the commentary on part two of his life, his proud years.

[15:32] The key phrase, verse 16, but after Uzziah became powerful, his pride led to his downfall. Do you see the three-step progression here?

Powerful. Powerful. Leads to pride. Leads to downfall. Powerful. Pride. Downfall.

Notice his pride is in the middle. It is both the result of his success and the cause of his failure. He became powerful by the blessing of the Lord.

It was because he humbly sought the Lord that the Lord gave him success. But the very blessing of the Lord became a temptation to pride that proved too much for Uzziah.

He was fine until he became powerful. Do we get that? He was fine when he was young and inexperienced and inadequate for the job.

[16 : 42] He was fine when he was weak and poor and needy because it taught him to look outside of himself to the Lord for help.

And so as long as he sought the Lord, God gave him success. Oh, but things are different now. He's no longer the inexperienced 16-year-old king of the kingdom in shambles. Rather, under the blessing of God, he's now wealthy, successful, famous, and powerful.

And it was this blessing that led to his downfall, his undoing. He couldn't handle success. He couldn't handle the fame and the power and the wealth.

It went straight to his head. For after Uzziah became powerful, his pride led to his downfall. He found it a much harder thing to handle power than weakness.

[17 : 46] And most men are the same. They can handle weakness. In ways that they cannot handle power, they can handle adversity in ways they cannot handle success.

Now, why is that so? Why does pride so often follow a condition of power and success? Well, it gets back to what James has been getting at all through his letter, that there are these things in our hearts called evil desires.

And we can easily think that the key factor to our success was something we did. I must have done something good. I mean, look at this.

Look at the kingdom. It's turned around. It's turned 180 degrees. And we start to think that it's us that have made the difference.

And rather than overflowing with gratitude and falling down and saying, Oh, God, this is your doing. And it's all of mercy and grace. I haven't deserved a thing.

[18 : 52] We rather start to suck the praise to ourself. And so Uzziah, rather than being humble before the Lord at his great success and realizing that was all due to the great help of God.

Instead, he lets it go to his head. And he starts to think that there must be something really special about him, like everybody else is saying, like the newspapers are saying, it must be true.

And his heart was lifted up with his own self-importance. That's pride. And pride is an attitude of the heart.

It's an unseen, as it were, an inward attitude of the heart. But it oozes out. It oozes out. And we can see Uzziah's pride oozing out in three different ways.

Number one, he stopped seeking the Lord in prayer. You see it in verse five. The implication is there. It says as long as he sought the Lord, God gave him success.

[19 : 59] But there came a time when he quit seeking the Lord because there was an end to his success. When he became powerful, he stopped seeking the Lord.

And so his success ended. Oh, what prayer warriors we are when we're in great need. When we're in weakness and helplessness.

But oh, when we're visited with a little success and power, we easily are deceived into thinking that we now have some wisdom. We now have some reserves of wealth and we've got some success that we can draw on.

We're no longer the rookie here. We've got a little bit of experience and we can handle this situation. And so we're not so dependent upon the Lord as we once were.

But it's all a lie, isn't it? Because every moment of success we depend upon the Lord for. And our need for him is no less.

[21 : 01] In fact, our need for him in success is even greater. Why? Because we now need him to keep us humble under his blessing. That's no small grace.

We now need him to keep us relying on him when we're in a strong position. And so we ought to seek him for grace more, not less.

In our times of power and success. A powerful condition carries an illusion, though, of self-sufficiency. And we think it's something that we can now handle because look what we have accomplished.

And we forget that it's all been because of the Lord. And so we no longer seek the Lord for his help. Or we may keep up prayer, but it's far from the cry that it used to be.

There's a whole lot of desperation that's just not found in our prayers anymore. There's no urgency. Lord, unless you bless me, I'll fail. I will not glorify you here and there.

[22 : 08] You must bless me, Lord, or I will fall. And that urgency is gone. This self-reliance, this pride, it's leaning on the arm of the flesh as if we have some self-sufficiency now.

And it blinds us to our real need of grace. And so pride makes us infrequent visitors at the throne of grace. We stop seeking the Lord with the urgency of felt need.

And so Uzziah, he's still king. He still has military conquests. And so instead of beginning his military campaigns with seriously seeking God's help, he now just goes through the motions of the formality of it or else omits it altogether.

He no longer needs God's blessings on his crops and animals and projects. He's got that all underhand. He's dug cisterns to water the crops. And he no longer prays for wisdom and strength. He's got the whole apparatus of government finely tuned and working. When he became powerful, he also became proud.

[23 : 27] So let me show you a proud man. He's a pastor and he has a sermon to prepare. Oh, but he's done this many times before and he knows how to do it.

And so he goes into his study and he opens his Bible and he digs in. But he doesn't pray. He doesn't cast himself upon the Lord for help.

And so he doesn't look like a proud man to any outward observer. He's not out strutting on the street telling everyone how great he is. No, he's in his room studying the Bible.

But let me tell you, he is a very proud man who thinks that he can get on in his studies without divine intervention and help, illuminating the mind and heart, teaching him.

And folks, it's frightening how easy it is to do just that. How easily we rest in ourselves, our self-sufficient pride.

[24 : 38] Or here's a student and she spends hours studying every week, but never does she ask God for help. She's a good student.

She knows how to read the text, how to study, how to prepare, how to write papers. And so there may be the formal prayer, give me help, and off she goes at her books.

She may be quiet, she may be shy, but her pride is oozing in her self-confidence, her self-confident prayerlessness.

How many times do we set about our work without prayer? How many things in our day do we not even think about seeking the Lord for his wisdom, for his strength, for his help?

Brothers and sisters, I think this is perhaps our most common expression of pride. Our prayerlessness. Oh, the things that we do not pray about.

[25 : 44] We do not seek the Lord for his help. You see, if prayer is the language of humble dependence on the Lord, if prayer is the confession of weakness and inadequacy, then what are we saying when we don't pray?

I can handle this one. I'm sufficient without you. And we have forgotten that without me, you can do nothing, Jesus says. He says that to his disciples.

Without me, you can do nothing. You can't even turn the page on the book to study the next page without me unless I give you the breath, the strength.

Unless I keep your mind working, unless I keep you healthy, you couldn't go to work. You couldn't do a thing. And so we sing, I need thee every hour.

And we live like we need him once a week. Or maybe once a day. But when we follow the Lord Jesus Christ through the Gospels, we're struck with his prayerfulness.

[27 : 04] Here's a man of prayer. The Lord Jesus, like none other. Hugh Martin in his book, *The Shadow of Calvary*, explains Jesus' regular prayer life as part of his humiliation in stooping from the glories that were his, stooping to identify himself with us.

And so he humbled himself and became a man. And sometimes we don't think what that means. That he became a man. What did he assume when he assumed our human nature?

He assumed a frail human nature. It wasn't the human nature in the garden before sin. No, he assumed a fallen, a nature that was weak and frail.

Frail. He had to become like his brothers in every way. Sin only accepted.

So he was like us in every way except for sin. And so he assumed our human nature in its frailty, its weakness, its neediness, its insufficiency, its inadequacy.

[28:18] Because he would experience himself all that we experience except for sin. So in taking our humanity, he places himself in a position of weakness.

A position of absolute dependence upon God, his Father. A dependence in which he needed to pray just as much as you and I need to pray.

You see, he refused to draw upon the power of his own divinity. That's part of his humility. That's part of his becoming like us in every way. He would not just reach over and on his own power, when he's hungry, change those stones into bread.

But rather he would be thrown upon God to give him his daily bread. And so have to pray for it. Like you do. And like I do.

So if he's to receive grace and power, it must come from his Father. And if it's to come, it will come in answer to prayer. For he finds himself under the same rule of receiving.

[29:31] Ask and you will receive. And so he too must ask at the throne of grace, just as we. And it's all part of his becoming like us in every way.

Oh, he was so rich, but he became so poor as to stand with us in a position of weakness and inadequacy and to cry out to God for grace.

And so it is of this Jesus that we read in Mark 1.35, very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house, and went off to a solitary place where he prayed.

And Luke lets us know that wasn't an exception, but it was the rule that Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.

And we wonder, what's Jesus doing? Why is he praying so much? He's God. Oh, but we forget that he placed himself in the position of weakness when he became man.

[30:31] He humbled himself and took our position and showed us how to live. And when we watch him, what do we see? We see him praying. We see him praying much because that's how God brings grace to the needy.

He gives more grace. He gives it to those who are humble enough to ask. So any lack of prayerlessness or prayerfulness is proud repudiation of our neediness, our dependence on God.

That's the first way pride oozed out of Uzziah. He stopped praying like he once did. He stopped seeking the Lord. But secondly, his pride oozed out in his being unfaithful to the Lord.

And verse 16 takes us just to one example of his unfaithfulness. But it's the defining unfaithfulness that shows us just what Uzziah has become.

He tells us a specific deed and lays it at the door of his pride. Verse 16, But after Uzziah became powerful, his pride led to his downfall. He was unfaithful to the Lord his God and entered the temple of the Lord to burn incense on the altar of incense.

[31:56] Now that was a job for only the priests at God's command. Uzziah knew this, but he did it anyway. He was unfaithful.

The word means he transgressed. God had drawn a line. Only the priest is to offer incense in the tabernacle. And he was unfaithful. He transgressed. He stepped over the line.

That is pride oozing out of him. That's what God says.

You see, being king was not enough for him. He would take to himself the honor as well as being a priest. I can do the work of a priest just as well as Zechariah can.

Watch me. And he takes the censer and he heads right into the temple to offer incense. No work is above him.

[32:57] You see, he's so full of himself. His own self-importance. Pride leads a man to think that somehow he's above the law. The law is for everybody else. But I'm king.

That's what pride tells him. I can do what I want. I'm the exception. And pride chafes against any restrictions that the Lord might seek to place upon us.

Thou shalt not. And pride walks right over the line. It's a very proud thing to do what God says we're not to do.

Kids, I don't know that there's a whole lot more things that are proud than that. God says don't. And you say I'm more important than you, God.

I will. That is pride. We see it here in Uzziah. We see it sadly enough in ourselves. And so Azariah, the priest, the chief priest, the one who's charged with keeping order of the temple, making sure that only the people go in who are supposed to.

[34:05] The chief priest, Azariah, is going in to confront the proud king. And you're one of the priests.

Are you following him in? There were 80 of them with courage enough to go in with Azariah to confront this arrogant king for overstepping his bound.

And they went in and they said, it's not right for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to the Lord. That is for the priests, the descendants of Aaron who have been consecrated to burn incense.

Leave the sanctuary for you have been unfaithful and you will not be honored by the Lord God. And Uzziah thanked the Lord for stopping him in his tracks, for his kindness and sending a messenger to rebuke him, to correct him.

No, he didn't. He should have. Think of the kindness of God in sending a warning shot across the bow of his ship. There's 81 of them in there and they're all saying the same thing.

[35 : 12] It's not right for you to do this. You know that. Now get out. Stop right now. But instead, his pride keeps oozing and the rebuke only angers him and he flies into an angry rage against his rebukers.

And that's the third expression of his pride. Correction angered him. Correction angered him. Pride refuses to be corrected.

It will not admit wrongdoing, but lashes out at the one bringing the correction. Sinful anger is a form of pride. Have you identified it as such?

When you were angry, sinfully angry, have you identified that's pride? That's wounded pride. Here are the priests standing in the way of something that Uzziah wanted to do.

And he's angry with them. Young people, are you too proud to be corrected? What's your attitude toward your parents when they come to you and say, it's not right for you to do that?

[36 : 18] Do you thank God for sending you that message of mercy calling you out of the wrong way and into the right? Or do you get angry? Do you just get a little hot under the collar at mom or dad for pointing out your sin?

That is pride oozing out of you. And so while raging against these priests, leprosy broke out upon King Uzziah on his forehead.

That was an immediate judgment of God upon him. And so they hurried him out and he indeed is willing to go out now too. He's been struck by the Lord and he knows it.

He knows it. God opposes the proud.

He's determined to bring them down. He humbles those who exalt themselves. And as King Nebuchadnezzar once said, those who walk in pride, he is able to humble.

[37 : 27] And Uzziah is humbled. He has leprosy to the day he died. He has to live no longer palace, no more palace life for Uzziah. He has to live in a separated house because he has leprosy.

No longer able to bear the honors of the king and governing this nation. Now his son must rule in his place. And now, perhaps with the most irony of all, he's excluded from the temple of the Lord. Does he think to intrude into the temple wherever he wants to go and do whatever he wants? Then he will not even be allowed into the part of the temple, the outer courts, where he would have been allowed to go because now he has leprosy and he's excluded from any of the temple precincts.

And he's not buried with the kings when he dies. For the people said he had leprosy. You see, the stigma and humiliation stuck long after his death.

He had leprosy. Oh yeah, how did that happen? Well, let me tell you how it happened. And his pride would be retold in going into the temple to offer incense.

[38 : 40] Yes, those who walk in pride, he is able to humble. And so, the story of Uzziah's life, as long as he sought the Lord, God gave him success. But, after he became powerful, his pride led to his downfall.

Don't miss the obvious. Pride is our downfall. That's right on the face of it, isn't it? It causes us to stop praying with a sense of our need. And that's the first step down.

Pride will cause us to stop praying with a sense of need. And so, we forfeit the grace that could have been ours. But it also causes us to play fast and loose with God's laws and his commandments and brings God's painful disciplines or judgments upon us.

And pride can harden us to the calls of God to repent to where we refuse to be corrected. Yes, pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before the fall.

But consider another lesson that's perhaps not quite as apparent to us and it's Alistair Begg who pointed this out.

[39 : 54] That if pride is our downfall, then weakness is our advantage. Weakness is our advantage because it keeps us humble and God gives more grace to the humble.

So weakness is an advantage. what makes you feel your weakness? Well, I'll bet you the things that you tell me will be your trials of many kinds.

Therefore, consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds because it's making you feel your weakness grace. And that's humbling you and making you ask God for help. And He gives more grace to the humble. Those things that make us feel our weakness are keeping us from pride.

They're making us cry, who is sufficient for these things, O Lord? Lord, that's a healthy frame of mind to live in. In fact, it's the only healthy and safe way to live.

[41:06] These children, Lord, who is sufficient for these things? This responsibility, Lord, who is sufficient for these things? To be a salt that doesn't lose its savor at my job, Lord, who is sufficient for these things?

To be a light not hidden on a hill? Who is sufficient for these things? Oh, help me, Lord. You see, your weakness is an advantage.

It makes us desperate for more grace and trials serve this purpose. A severely tried man, William Cowper, wrote, trials make the promise sweet.

Trials give new life to prayer. Trials bring me to his feet. Lay me low and keep me there.

Trials, whatever makes you feel your weakness, is an advantage, isn't it? He had learned that weakness is his advantage. The Apostle Paul had learned the same lesson. Remember how God sent a very painful trial into Paul's life, so painful that it's called a thorn.

[42:23] Kids, you ever been pricked with a thorn? That's how bad it was. He called it a thorn, a messenger of Satan, to torment him. And it was so painful that three times, three seasons of prayer, he pleaded with the Lord saying, take it away from me.

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.

That is why for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

If pride is our downfall, weakness is our advantage. And so God sent that painful trial. Why? What was the purpose of God in sending the thorn?

Paul tells us in the text, 2 Corinthians 12, 7, lest I should become conceited because of the surpassing revelations that God had made to me. the thorn was sent to keep him humble.

[43:47] And without the thorn, he would have become proud, conceited. And that pride would have been his downfall.

Can you think what the New Testament would read like if Paul had not had that weakness, had not had that thorn, to keep him from becoming conceited?

Can't you just see him coming into town? He's the preacher, you see. He's got his nose tilted back a little. He's conceited.

He's a bit aloof from people. He expects everybody to do everything his way. He's the preacher, the apostle, had many revelations. Doesn't have much patience for people.

after all, they ought to listen to him. He's the sent one from Christ. And so he uses his authority to lord it over others. He's lifted up.

[44:51] He's a proud man. Our New Testaments wouldn't look anything like they do. But instead, what do we find? We find a humble man, the apostle Paul, a humble servant to the churches, willing to spend, be spent for others.

Enduring all things for the sake of God's elect, using his authority to build them up rather than to tear them down. Gentle as a nurse, caring for her own little children.

Patient as a father with his own children. Not too important to be found gathering firewood in the rain when they're shipwrecked on the island of Malta. Where's Paul?

They're always out in the shrubs, gathering dead wood for the fire. Viewing himself as the least of the apostles, the worst of sinners, willing to lay down his very life in the cause of Christ and his church.

He says, I owed it to that thorn, that thorn. It made me feel my weakness. weakness. And I learned that weakness is my advantage if it sends me to Christ because then more grace is given and the power of Christ rests on me.

[46:12] It tabernacles on me. So, I will be all the more glad and rejoice in my weaknesses. It sounds a lot like James, considering it pure joy when these trials expose my inadequacies.

so, what is there in your life making you feel your weakness just now?

Maybe you thought of that thing as a liability. No, God loves you too much to leave you at the mercy of your pride. He wants to lead you to more grace and he wants to lead you to the power of Christ resting, resting, resting upon you.

So, by faith, see that weakness as your advantage, that you're better off for it in your life, and embrace it as such.

Can't help but feel like Grace Fellowship Church has gone through a season of unusual amount of trials and health and not just the economy, that as well, but just the many people.

[47:31] Sometimes I have a hard time just remembering all that there are to pray for in the congregation because there's been surgeries and there's been all these problems. I wonder, are we getting the most mileage out of them as a congregation?

And personally and individually, am I using these weaknesses to my advantage? You see, it's not weakness itself that is to our advantage.

It's weakness improved that leads to our advantage. It's weakness that brings us to Christ that is our advantage. If it's just weakness, well, you can be as carnal and proud in your weakness as in your strength, but if weakness will be improved, oh, then it is a great advantage.

If it will bring you to Jesus, if it will cause you to come near to Him who comes near to us in our weakness and He comes laden with more grace and power to rest upon us, then weakness is our advantage.

So, let your weakness drive you to the throne of grace. Be found often there. Seek the Lord and His strength.

[48:42] Seek His face always. Be one who prays without ceasing, who can't go far in the day without saying, oh, Lord, I need you now. I'm heading into this situation.

Lord, I need you now. I'm heading home to a family at the end of the day and I'm tired and I need you now. I'm heading into a day and there's some things on my list that are not pleasant for me to do.

I need you now. I'm going into an ordinary day, the same run-of-the-mill things. Lord, I need you today as much as the first day on the job. In all your ways, acknowledge Him.

He will direct your paths. Don't lean on your own arm. Don't lean on your own understanding. In all your ways, forgetting in nothing His blessing to seek.

That's the way to live. And those who humble themselves will find great blessings. Spurgeon used to talk about the angels in heaven. Seeing him come so often to the throne of grace, saying, oh, it's him again.

[49:50] It's him again. Are you that well known at the throne of grace? Are you there that often that the angels would say, oh, it's him again? He's an often visitor at the throne of grace.

Heaven will reveal how every weakness was to your advantage at every turn in your life. These things have not just fallen out to you willy-nilly, randomly, these trials and weaknesses, but your all-wise Lord has tailor-made them for you to make you feel your inadequacy and to run to him and to enjoy his fullness of grace.

Run to him. Live upon him. Make use of that best of heavenly friends that we heard of this morning. And my unconverted friends, whoever you be, the greatest pride of all is to reject the Lord Jesus Christ, God's gift of salvation to this world.

There's nothing that you could do that would be more proudful than that. Do you think him unworthy of your life? That's pride. Do you think that you have a better plan for your life than him?

Oh, how proud. Do you think you can get on better in life without him? Oh, what self-sufficient pride. There'll come a day when you'll stand alone before God and you'll see just how much you need him and you cannot survive without him.

[51:30] Humble yourself. There's grace for whoever you are, whatever you've done, come this morning and you'll find more grace in Jesus than you have sinned.

Oh, Lord, it is you that has made us aware of our need again this morning. now we thank you for that. It's not just been a visit of 81 priests, but it's been the visit of our Savior himself with us in spirit to remind us that without him we can do nothing.

Forgive us, Lord, for our self-sufficient pride. Forgive us for all that we undertake thinking we don't need you. Thank you for your great patience with us.

Thank you that you have made amazing promises. May they be fulfilled in us, the promise that you give more grace to the humble. Fulfill that promise in us, Lord.

Remind us tomorrow morning, remind us this afternoon, remind us Wednesday afternoon, whenever it is that we tend to be self-sufficient. Oh, meet us with this sense of our need and draw us close to your throne and close to your heart.

[52 : 43] Lord, that your power might rest upon us, that we might have a different view of trials and weakness. Granted, for Jesus' sake, we pray in his name.

Amen.