

Series: *Growing in Christ*  
Message Title: *Sustaining Grace*  
Date: Sunday, February 12, 2017  
Scripture: 2 Corinthians 12:7-10  
Speaker: David H. McKinley  
Location: Warren Baptist Church, Augusta, GA

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## Introduction

Review: G-R-O-W-I-N-G in Christ means *We Grow in Grace*. "A growing Christian knows the gospel is rooted in God's redeeming grace and is sustained and secured throughout life by His amazing grace." See 2 Peter 3:18.

Grace is the source of all spiritual life and growth. Spiritual growth from start to finish is all of Grace. We are saved and secured by grace. Read Ephesians 2:8-9. But we are also sustained by grace and strengthened for service by God's grace.

One of the chief concerns of our day has to do with *sustainability*—sustainable development and resource. The pace of human progress has created some environmental challenges for us. A major area of development has to do with identifying and maintaining strategies and systems

that support development while protecting environment.

Our consumerism can create a carnivorous conduct toward creation.

It is also vital for us to understand the need for sustainability in our spiritual lives. If we fail to learn to lean on grace, we fail to live out our faith and to sustain "a long obedience in the same direction."

Sometimes life seems unbearable and unsustainable. Do you ever run out of resource? Stress? Responsibility? Adversity? Sickness? Disappointment? Rejection? Failure? Weakness?

See Job 5:7 and Job 14:1. Almost sounds like "Double, double toil and trouble." It more than a witch's brew in Shakespeare's play, Macbeth; it is a part of life!

We find we have a lack of natural resource to survive the manifold challenges of and changes in life. For this reason, we need grace!

This is why so many of the New Testament letters begin with a greeting of grace! If you have never done so, take your Bible and starting with Romans, read the opening and closing verses of each book (letter). How often do you see a salutation and affirmation of grace?

Why? Because we need sustaining grace in all of life! One of the most powerful passages on sustaining grace is found in 2 Corinthians 12. In fact, the entire book of 2 Corinthians is one filled with the personal struggles Paul faced in his ministry. A church he founded questioned his leadership, credibility, motives, and more. In this book, Paul gives a glimpse into the heart of the many struggles—faced not only by pastors, but believers. From the start, the theme is *comfort!*

2 Corinthians 12:7-10—“My grace is sufficient for you”



## 1. The Places We Need God's Sustaining Grace

There is great variety of thoughts and ideas about Paul's "thorn in the flesh"—spiritual, emotional, physical. Some have speculated epilepsy, migraines, eye problem, temptation, or a person, etc.

### • In Persecution

Paul knew about the struggle to continue in the face of resistance and rejection.

2 Corinthians 4:1, 8-10

Somehow in the mindset of "faith makes you feel better" ("butter makes it better") and "celebrity status Christianity," we have failed to realize the normalcy of persecution, resistance and rejection. Note these verses: Matthew 5:11-12, Acts 6:8-15, 2 Timothy 3:12, 1 Peter 4:16.

Christian bashing has become an open sport in post-Christian American society. Targeting Christians for suppression, injury and death has become a common practice around the world.

Yet, God is sovereign in the sufferings of His people. Some struggle to understand how to reconcile God's goodness with the harshness we observe, but our lives are about another world. 2 Corinthians 4:12-18.

- **In Temptation**

"Satan and flesh". Satan is the deceiver, accuser and destroyer.

Job gives us a "behind the scenes" view of Satan's work to destroy those who love God and seek to live for His glory.

The word used for flesh is not *soma* (i.e., body), but flesh in the sense of a broader term— *sarx*, the place where we battle with temptation.

"For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do" (Galatians 5:17 ESV).

See 1 Corinthians 10:12-13 and Hebrews 4:15-16.

## • In Affliction

... we need grace! One likely scenario is that Paul did struggle with something physical—a physical ailment, an Achilles heel—to distract him, to discourage him and to hinder the advancement of the gospel in Paul's life.

"thorn in the flesh" not like a prickly rose bush, but more like a stake that tied him down!

Note to believers: Not all sickness is caused by sin. Job's comforters said Job sinned and was sick—he needed to repent and to be healed. Some people try to say any sickness can be dispelled by faith, but sometimes God uses even chronic weakness, suffering and struggle for His glory. This was true for Paul, too!

I have faced two major points of personal affliction where I have had to lean into God's all-sufficient grace:

1. Life altering reality of infertility—mid-20's for 7 years—but God had a providential plan for us. Not a Plan B of our creation, but a Plan A of His grace—Joseph and Mary Elizabeth.

Have I told you #6 grandchild is coming?

2. Life threatening discovery of a dissected carotid artery at 43—hospitalization, eye damage, recovery—when I was suppose to be in the Bahamas helping with hurricane relief. Thanksgiving dinner came from Boston Market on a hospital tray. In the hospital room at 4:00 a.m., I heard Adrian Rogers on TV speak from these passages of Scripture—Psalm 119:49-50, 71-72, 75!

## **2. The Purposes We Find in God's Sustaining Grace**

Jesus suffered in the purpose and plan of God for us—not so that we may not suffer, but that we might be saved! Read Matthew 10:24. Suffering is part of discipleship and to this end, God's purposes are seen and realized in our lives through such experiences.

- **To teach us humility and dependency**

2 Corinthians 12:7

Paul's reason for the thorn? "Conceit"—self-reliance, self-indulgence and self-righteousness. James 4:6

- **To reveal the greater authority of the spiritual world over the material world**

It doesn't take much adversity in life to demonstrate the inadequacy and inability of material things to satisfy and deliver us from anger and fear in the face of limitation and loss.

Yet, God proves the greater value of spiritual hope (1 Peter 1:6-7) and the greater reality of spiritual power (Daniel 3:24-25).

To this end, we set our eyes and hearts on a greater future hope (2 Corinthians 4:18).

- **To enable us to experience comfort so we may extend this same comfort to others**

2 Corinthians 1:3-6. God builds empathy in His people by providing ministry through His people. This is what builds community also!

- **To remind us we do not live by explanations, but by promises**

The God who has spoken through His Word, keeps His Word and proves His trustworthiness in the trials of life. 1 Corinthians 12:9—grace sufficient!



God expands resources beyond possibility (fish and loaves). He shows up when we thought we were forgotten (Daniel). He gives strength beyond measure.

**>To demonstrate that transformation is better than substitution**

2 Corinthians 12:10 "Give me something else (2 Corinthians 12:8)—remove it!" God says, "No. I'll transform it and make it something strong." 2 Corinthians 12:9.

2 Corinthians 12:7—note Paul's reference to this "thorn" as a *gift*. Strange gift? But a gift of grace!

As believers, we embrace the security of Providence. "Providence is the most frequent way God operates in the world and controls the daily course of events to effect His purposes in His people and in the world."

—John MacArthur

In my life, infertility: "God allows us to travel pathways we would have never chosen to experience blessings we could have never comprehended." Abigail and Marcelo—two wonderful spouses for our children and

additions to our family . . . and five wonderful grandchildren with one on the way!

Grace. Grace. Grace.

The grace of God is found in a person— His Son, Jesus Christ. 2 Corinthians 8:9, John 1:16. "God's saving grace is extravagant, exceptional and expensive." GRACE = God's Riches At Christ's Expense.

Have you tasted, been touched, experienced this grace in life? "I am not worthy!" You are right. "But where sin increased, grace abounded all the more."

You are not beyond God's saving grace and you can know God's sustaining grace in your life. It is one grace—amazing grace!

Parting blessing: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit." Amen! Philippians 4:23.