

Topic	Thriving despite life's disappointments
Reference	2 Corinthians 12:7-10
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Speaker	Arnold Lim

Simon Cynic says, *"millennials are probably the most unhappy people on the face of earth"*.

It shows you beneath the surface, this is how people try to deal with issues. Life will be like this, I am disappointed again. If that happens too much, I go into anxiety and we dealt with that last month. When I get more anxious, I don't like me, I develop low self-esteem and the cycle repeats itself and you push this to the age, a person gets depressed. So we want to perhaps this morning deal with this very real issue.

Disappointment often deals with, I am disappointed with self or I am disappointed because I didn't live up to my parents, my husband, my boss. Here are the lyrics of a famous song

I'm tired of being what you want me to be
 Feeling so faithless, lost under the surface
 I don't know what you're expecting of me
 Put under the pressure of walking in your shoes
 Caught in the undertow, just caught in the undertow
 Every step that I take is another mistake to you
 Caught in the undertow, just caught in the undertow
"Numb" Linkin Park

The way the lyrics are written is like a person is drowning. He is being pooled under water by the undertow. He is floating. He is just going through the motions and here it is about people. A lot of people, I like to suggest just go through the motions. They are not thriving, they come to church and sit but life just passes them by. So there is a hollowness in this. Today we want to look at a topic where Paul was disappointed and what happened instead was, this disappointment made him thrive.

My grace is sufficient for you for my power is made perfect in weakness 2 Corinthians 12:9

This text talks about Paul having a thorn in his flesh. It could mean a medical condition and a lot of reformed literature they like to believe this. Why? Because it has got to do with the charismatics. So they want to believe that this is medical, so that they can tell our charismatic friends, see it is medical and God didn't heal him. But the context of 2-Corinthians I like to suggest, that is one possibility but another way of looking at thorn is simply people. A person is a thorn in your flesh and in 2-Corinthians you find he has heavy opposition from a group of people. The truth is we don't know what the thorn was, but it was something that caused him a lot of pain, physical or mental we don't know.

Earlier on in medieval literature, people say it could be a temptation. We don't know, quite likely I think it is either physical or a group of people. I want to give you four points:

1. Bring your desires and hurts to God.
2. Kingdom values and our expectations in life
3. Disappointments and self-deception
4. When you are weak you are strong

Sometimes we have to look at the way the nuances on the way the verse is written and what Paul writes is

⁸Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me.

Let me ask a question, when in the New Testament can you recall someone else who pleaded three times for something so overbearing and dreadful to be removed and God did not. It was Jesus who in the Garden of Gethsemane three times. Why is this important? Because biblical narrative, when they write things, they write things that are important. What happened when Jesus was at the cross, he said my God, my God why did you forsake me. There is a whole theology to that but at the moment God saw, God didn't see Jesus, He saw sin and God in its humanity, in his pain cried out, my God why did you forsake me again. Why do the gospel writers write that? Why do the psalmist says, out of my depths I cry out to you? Why did Job say, I curse the day I was born.

We often underestimate that scripture really tells us, guys be real, don't be fake. There is no need to be with God. You feel it, you want it, whatever it is you take it to God. Because I think there is a tendency among Christian circles to bottle it inside. Here is the reality. If you go through a series of disappointments or some issues or some trauma, it affects you, you just don't realize it did and it resurfaces in many ways. Science tells us this, there is a simple word for it, it is called a coping mechanism. Coping mechanisms can come in various forms. It is always anxious, always jittery, that's a coping mechanism.

What happens is that when you get old in life, anything happens at work you do the same. It is a coping mechanism, it is triggered. You get into relationship with someone and things go bad, you want to walk out. Some people for example, when they have a problem, they want to sleep. Some people when they have issues, they eat. It is a coping mechanism. It is very-very important to recognize these things and I will tell you why in point 3, but here is the first point. The point is, you take these things and you give it to God. They are unhealthy and they are healthy coping mechanism.

A writer tells a story of a man who was a very active churchgoer, whose mother committed suicide. He tries to deal with it and like any good reformed Calvinist church, he reads the Bible. He does what every good little boy is supposed to do. It doesn't remove the pain. So he sees Dr. Larry Crabb and he goes through sessions and he could quote the psalms and then Dr. Larry Crabb picked up something which is what we call a blind side. We all have this. The boy was using the Bible to numb his pain, now that's very telling because that's a coping mechanism. So here is some truth. You can use your preaching, your music, your bible study leading, your coming to church, your memorizing the Bible, you can use anything as a coping mechanism and that's very dangerous and as Dr. Larry Crabb says it, that which was meant to grow him was actually stunting him. Dr. Larry Crabb told him, you just got to put it aside and he says you got to do two things; It's okay to desire. Let's be real, we come to life brought into this world with expectations. We want to go to school and have friends and then you get bullied in school. Then you want to get good grades and please your parents, somewhat that didn't quite happen. As you get older you wanted to get into good relationship, that didn't quite happen and the danger with us is that we put it inside and we push it down inside. That again is a coping mechanism. Here Paul just takes it to God, God would you remove this and Christ takes this before God, is it your will take it away.

Why does the Bible record this?

Jesus came to the world knowing he was going to die and his humanity recorded to us that it was so dreadful, he says Lord if it is your will take this away. These are important things to pick up. It makes us human. Here is the next one, it is not enough to say it is okay to desire, it is okay to hurt. Now this is the starting point of discipleship. If you don't come to God broken, don't come to God hungry, don't come to God bankrupt, God becomes like a supplement, he is not the center, so we start off right, we start off clean, we go deep in and says, yes I come to church and look around and I feel jealous. That's it God, I said it and you will be surprised because that is the doorway to knowing God. I don't know how to

overstate this, it is your doorway. Either that you come to God like the rich young ruler, what can I do to gain eternal life and he is blind to his crutch.

Here is the big picture I want us to pick up. He says something very strange, which is found in chapter 11 all the way to 12. He said after he gives the key points,

“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses,

Isn't that strange boost. Number one, you shouldn't boost, number two boost of weakness. Why? There has got to be some context in this. One of the key things happening in 2-Corinthians is this issue of super apostles. Let me give you a background of 2-Corinthians. This actually is the third letter. He wrote another letter which was very severe, a lot of issues have happened and now at this point some people have come into the church and they say, you look at Paul he is not much of a speaker, he is not trained, he is not like Moses. Here is one word that repeats in 2-Corinthians, glory. These super apostles had one thing. They had the gift of visions and they were bragging it. They were trained speakers. They knew the Old Testament. They were very groomed, very classy and they had a lot of gifts. They had visions all over. It tells you something about today's church. That today in church people compete.

We have got to be very careful when Christianity is too slick, too packaged, too wow! Look at that. It is bling-bling Christianity. Paul gives two distinct examples. The first is found in the chapter beforehand.

2 Corinthians 11:30-33 (ESV)

³⁰If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness.³¹The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, he who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying.³²At Damascus, the governor under King Aretas was guarding the city of Damascus in order to seize me,³³but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall and escaped his hands.

He tells the story of Damascus, where he tells that he was completely helpless, shamefully let down like a piece of bread, that's my power. Then Paul tells them another thing

2 Corinthians 12:1-6 (ESV)

12 I must go on boasting. Though there is nothing to be gained by it, I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord. ²I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I

do not know, God knows. ³ And I know that this man was caught up into paradise—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows— ⁴ and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter. ⁵ **On behalf of this man I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast, except of my weaknesses—** ⁶ though if I should wish to boast, I would not be a fool, for I would be speaking the truth; but I refrain from it, so that no one may think more of me than he sees in me or hears from me.

Paul is telling that this man is me and this boosting is worthless. Paul is driving to this key point. He says when I am weak, I am strong. Now this is very important to wrap ourselves around about why we get disappointed, because this is about the values of the kingdom of God. Nicodemus comes at night; the Samaritan woman comes at day. She is weak, he is strong. She is last, he is first. She will find her life, he loses it, although the story changes at the end. Of course, 1-Corinthians tells us the wisdom the cross is foolishness to men.

We are seeing kingdom values. You notice, Paul never talks about the kingdom of God. He only talks about the gospel. Jesus only talks about the kingdom. The scripture is telling us that the kingdom of God and the gospel are the same thing. They impact one another.

You have low self-esteem because you feel like you are a failure. The kingdom of God is a paradoxical kingdom. Now this is central. Paul is telling us that there is a war going on inside of you and the war is between the kingdom of me, that says my sense of identity is because I do well at work, I get married, I have meaningful relationships, I live, learn, leave a legacy. This is all secular. I actualize my life. Then there is a kingdom of God that takes you away and puts God in the middle. It elevates all these things to the side and it fills you with something else and it says your life, my life is bigger than me.

Paul Tripp says this

*"Here it is. When the enemy somehow tricks you into squeezing the size of your life to the size of your personal dreams, wants, and needs, he has got you right where he wants you." "If your hope disappoints you, it is the wrong kind of hope. You see, hope in God never disappoints, precisely because it is hope *in God.* This means that hope placed in any other thing will always end up disappointing."*

Think about it about those things that we always thought gave us happiness. They did for five minutes. Paul Tripp says to put your hope in God. So here is the key point I want to pick up, disappointment in myself, disappointment to others, here is one thing. Jesus came to this earth. They looked at him, they say wow!

He can feed 5000 people, he can do this. He is going to save us from the Romans, disappointed. The key point this morning is disappointed to who and I want to ask you the key thing for us, are we a disappointment to God. That's the only thing that matters. You settle that right, everything else flows from there. In Luke 13, Jesus tells a story of a fig tree that does not blossom. Before that he tells a story of people who died. The fig tree does not blossom, which is representing Israel and so the owner comes in and this is a disappointment to him, so he tells them to cut it down. The orchard hand says, give it time, I will take care of the tree, give it another chance and after one year if it doesn't blossom cut it down. The orchard hand is Jesus. So, Jesus is saying, he wants to stand in the gap between me and God, because if you are honest, we disappoint God, why because we don't really care we disappoint God.

Jesus cares and he stands in the gap to take you to the father. Plato once said, the worst of all deceptions is self-deception. Self-deception is the worst enemy. Let's take that to a real level and that can be anything. Here is one example, I came to life hoping for a good marriage, didn't work out. The lesson I learn, I am bad, I can't be a good husband, I am useless in love. That's the devil whispering to you. That's the messenger of Satan. It is painful, so one of the most interesting and understated things about this text is Paul understands why the thorn was given. He had a problem, he was proud. The point is, the pain taught him something about himself. Here is the lesson, we learn more about ourselves when we go through pain and hardship than when you are relaxing. You learn nothing when your life is paradise, but put you through the grinder it does two things to you, it either makes you closer to God or it pushes you further from God, nothing in between. It is never neutral. What the text is telling you? If you humble yourself, if you have the mind of Christ in you, you will learn something and Paul learned he was conceited.

Why is this important? Because if you look at the context, on a conscious level he knew that visions has no values. So look at the context. Earlier on in chapter 12

I must go on boasting. Though there is nothing to be gained by it, I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord.

He knows in his mind that visions and revelations has no value, yet he is conceited. The text is telling us that all these things are usually subconscious. You and I rarely know our condition. That's why the Bible talks about judging others. If you are judgmental, you most likely wouldn't know it. If you are always running someone down, you most likely won't know it. If you are critical, most likely you will not know it. We are very often the type that magnifies our good

and downplay our bad. Again, it is a coping mechanism. So earlier on Paul says this in chapter 4,

2 Corinthians 4:18 (ESV)

¹⁸as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

We have to look at life through the eyes of our heart renewed by the spirit, not by broken eyes, eyes of pity, eyes of anxiety. It is really-really important. Process what happens in life. If you open your ears enough and hear, God speaks to you and He speaks to you through people, like a stranger on the road and He reveals things about your self. To Paul it was conceit. You can only do that if you will allow people to speak to your heart.

Disappointment will sap you and you will not leave.

2 Corinthians 10:4-6 (ESV)

⁴For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. ⁵We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and **take every thought captive to obey Christ**, ⁶being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete.

This passage is often misread because it implies you take captive your thoughts. That is not the context. Who takes captive your thoughts. It is someone else. Paul is going to take captive the thoughts of those who have been influenced by this false apostles. The text means this, my thinking is subconscious, the only way I can get rid of it is if I open up to someone else. So, if you feel your life is bitter, if you feel your life is unhappy, if you feel life is disappointing you take it to God and you take it to someone in church.

When you are weak you are strong.

Grace is seen here tied with power in our text.

"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

You and I are much more powerful than we imagine. You and I under grace are much more powerful than we imagine. Contextually, he ties this to and then he ties it with this word, rest and the Greek rendering for rest because this imagery of Moses and the glory of God which is all over 2-Corinthians.

John Bunyan was in jail for 12 years, but John Bunyan when he was in prison, he had four children and one of the kid was blind. So, imagine, you are in prison and you got a blind daughter and you are in the 17th century. John Bunyan made a living by making shoe laces and the family had to literally live of charity, not one year it was 12 years. He describes it, he felt like his flesh was being torn from his bones, helpless in prison and I have a blind daughter out there. In the 12 years there, he said, in the darkness of that cell there was nothing to do, he started to write and as he wrote the pilgrim's progress came out.

When our strength runs out, God's strength begins. Because God's grace doesn't need our power. It is at that lowest moment where I cannot pull on my talent or my ability to speak, I am completely lost that God's power pulls you out, because it is sufficient, and you then realize you are much more powerful than you think, and this is what God told Paul. Paul says, I can't take it God, and God says you can, my grace is enough, and you are not only going to pull through this, you are going to thrive.

In a storm there is this silence and in that silence, God speaks and He speaks to you with the rest and in that small voice he brings you his strength. At the end of the verse, it ends with this.

¹⁰ For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

He has taken his problem and he has moved it to Christ and he shifted it to something else altogether. Now this to me is the key to fighting all these issues that weigh us down so much, is this word, transcendence. You are called to a life of transcendence to glorify God, my life is much-much bigger than my pain. When you glorify God, He will give you that peace, that surpasses all understanding.

At the point when I am lowest, I see God the clearest. Fanny Crosby wrote so many hymn but she is blind. Paul is trying to teach us to see with the eyes of our heart.