

Message: Endurance
Sermon Series: Promises
By Senior Pastor Tom Harrison
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Part of life is suffering. That is an inconvenient truth. There can be many causes of suffering. We can blame it all on Adam and Eve. After all, our first parents started the mess. We could also blame it on Satan, who is not our friend. Sometimes we know exactly where the problem lies but often, we are clueless as to the culprit. The second Adam, Jesus, bore the consequences of the problems created by Adam in the Garden of Eden. Jesus, who is the “Yes” to all God’s promises, still suffered.

Paul, the great missionary and author, also suffered (2 Corinthians 11:16 – 12:10). One source of suffering, he called “a thorn in the flesh.” After he pleaded three times for its removal, (it must have been quite serious) he received a word from the Lord that God’s grace was enough for him even with his limitations. That led to a surprising reversal for Paul: “*For when I am weak, then I am strong*”. We can endure because of God’s love and His grace.

APPLICATION: What is your experience with suffering? How do you relate to Jesus in His suffering? Why is endurance so important? If you are suffering and don’t know where to turn, remember your greatest strength will always be found in the grace of Jesus Christ. He has given us His body, the church, to help us follow Him. Pastors and other Christ-followers are here to connect you to the help you need. If this is a difficult season for you, Asbury’s “Stephen Ministers” are trained to listen not lecture. Each Stephen Minister has only one person they connect with at a time, so they are not too busy. Consider calling 918.392.1183 to have a Stephen Minister assigned to you.

2 Corinthians 12:7-10

*So to keep me from becoming **conceited** because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a **thorn** was given me in the flesh, a **messenger of Satan** to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. ⁸ Three times I **pleaded** with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. ⁹ 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 of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 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**.*

The sermon is about **endurance**... “*He who endures to the end will be saved...*” In hardship, we are tempted to quit. Physical suffering exposes the delusion of personal autonomy and self-sufficiency.

How do Christians figure things out? (This is for those who follow Jesus. If you’re not following Jesus, we are not imposing this on you.) How do Christians understand and apply our faith? Last week I shared 4 important ways we understand our faith. Instead of talking about guidance, this week, let’s talk about suffering and endurance.

1.) **Scripture.** We begin with “*What does the Bible say?*” The Bible doesn’t pull any punches. At every turn, it informs and warns us about the nature of the world. The Bible is full of stories of people who suffered. Some brought suffering upon themselves (Herod), some suffered like Job (inexplicable/confusing), some were victims of injustice and some suffered because they were

doing the right things (Joseph, Jesus, Stephen). Paul described some of his suffering for Christ in the previous chapter: (2 Cor 11:25-29) *Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one—I am talking like a madman—with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. 5 times I received at the hands of the Jews the 40 lashes less one. 3 times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. 3 times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak?)* He mentions the vision of heaven which he received and that leads us to our text – he believes this one thing that causes him to suffer (which unlike his previous list, is ongoing) serves to keep him humble.

2.) **Tradition.** What have other Christians thought about suffering? How have they endured? What can we learn from their example? Joni Ericson Tada is a superb illustration (become a quadriplegic after a diving accident when she was a teenager) and Paul David Tripp (kidney disease that nearly took his life).

3.) **Reason.** Everyone will suffer (and die). Reason tells us this is part of life. *“The grass withers, the flower fades, but the Word of the Lord will stand forever.”*

4.) **Experience.** How have I experienced suffering and how am I enduring? “Endurance” means we will have problems in life. So, what does the Bible say about it? How did people in the Bible deal with it? How have other believers in the church dealt with struggles, suffering and pain? Does it make sense that people suffer and struggle? Fourth, how have you struggled? How are you enduring?

Paul’s PROBLEM: Paul had a lot to boast about, but a **thorn in the flesh** knocked him down. Much speculation as to what this thorn was – was it physical, emotional or spiritual? We simply do not know. It’s a good thing we don’t know bc we can project our “thorns” onto him. If Paul’s thorn was migraine headaches, malaria, maybe arthritis or depression. I’d not be able to relate to them. But nobody likes a thorn. Sometimes our problems are other people or circumstances. Sometimes our problem is not failure, but success and we become conceited.

Paul’s RESPONSE – he prayed (“I pleaded”)

God’s RESPONSE: *“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”*

God didn’t remove his thorn, but God gave Paul His grace. That grace “is sufficient” is present tense, underscoring the ever-present availability no matter the circumstances (physical, material, emotional, mental –whether internal and external causes of suffering). Jesus experienced His share too. Paul would have to live with it.

Paul’s Conclusion – *“Therefore....”* This wasn’t the cup he preferred to drink from, but he would do it. This was his surrender to this reality. He couldn’t change it.

*“I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. ¹⁰ For the sake of Christ, then, I am **content** with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. Paul chooses to be content “for the sake of Christ” –when we*

don't have a theology of suffering, we think of hardship as a punishment. His suffering paints a different picture and his response gives us a model to follow.

Philippians 4:11-13 *Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.*

1 Tim 6:6-10 *Now there is great gain in godliness with contentment, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.*

Hebrews 13:5-6 *Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." So, we can confidently say, "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?"*

*For when I am **weak**, then I am **strong**.* We are strong when we ("like grass") transition from depending upon ourselves to depending upon God (eternal).

- 1.) Strong people won't reach out for help, bc of pride: we don't think we need it.
- 2.) Our suffering is more powerfully shaped by our perception (what's in our heart) then by what's actually happening to us.

APPLICATION: How do we ENDURE?

- 1.) **ALIGN.** This is the Apostle Paul – he didn't get what he wanted. Nor did Jesus, who didn't want to drink "the cup" of the cross. It's the way of surrender. Paul/Jesus kept focusing on the Lord. Suffering has a way that can make us forget about God and His presence, promises and power. Forgetfulness is a real problem for us.
- 2.) **BE with OTHERS** "Helping Others Follow Jesus"
- 3.) Learn **Contentment.** Not the absence of ambition, but the channeling of the ambition into doing the will of God. Contentment is present tense.

Have You given your life to Christ? For the **Sake** of Christ.