The Sufficiency Of God's Grace And Power
2 Corinthians 12:1-10
Big Idea: In defending his ministry (apostleship), Paul tells us that weakness in leadership is to be embraced because it keeps us from falling into pride, and teaches us to be dependent on the sufficiency of God's grace and power in the gospel.

Introduction – *Is the parachute enough?*
Author Max Lucado's – 'In The Grip Of Grace' tells a story where he calls us to imagine scene. You and I and half a dozen people are flying across the country in a small plane. All of a sudden the engine bursts into flames, and the pilot runs out of the cockpit. 'We're going to crash, we'll have to jump.' Just as well he knows where the parachutes are because we don't. He hands out the parachutes, and he gives us some quick instructions, as we all stand at the door to jump out of this plane.

The first passenger stands at the door and he yells out over the howling wind – 'Can I make a request?' 'What is it?' says the pilot. 'Any chance of a pink parachute instead of this black one … I prefer Pink?', says the first passenger. The pilot shakes his head in disbelief – 'Isn't it enough that I gave you a parachute at all?' And so the first passenger jumps.

The second passenger stands at the door – 'I'm wondering if there's anyway you can stop me from feeling nauseous … I'll get motion sickness.' 'No, but I can make sure that the parachute will work and safely get you to ground' says the pilot.

Each passenger comes with a different request.
- I'm afraid of heights, can you take away my fear?
- Can you change the plans, so that I don't have to jump?
- Can I jump later and not so soon?
- Can I have goggles for the jump because it's too windy?

And each time, the pilot says to each passenger – **'No, I've given you a parachute, and that is enough … it'll keep you safe and get you to ground'** Because only 1 thing is needed for the jump and he's provided it. But are the passengers content – no, they're not**. Now – is such a scene possible?** Highly unlikely. **But it does happen in the Christian life** – because sometimes when we ask God to remove our fears, or take away our disappointments, or change our circumstances, or take away our pain or remove our sickness – **he answers instead with a gentle push that leaves us airborne, falling, and carried only by the parachute of his grace and power.**

I want to say to us this evening - there will be times in life, in leadership and ministry, when God says, 'NO' – he allows darknesss to fall in our lives, he opens the floodgates and we find ourselves drowning – because of some tragedy, disappointment, rejection, injustice, some evil, some loss, sickness, suffering, unmet expectations. **They'll be times when the 1 thing you most want is the 1 thing God will not give you … you'll pray for the darkness to be lifted, for the circumstances to change, for the suffering to end, for the pain to go away, and God will say – No.** That was Paul's experience here in 2 Cor.12.

This was also Paul's struggle. Notice what Paul says in vv.7-9, *7b Therefore, so that I would not exalt myself – to stop me from being proud, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to torment me so that I would not exalt myself. 8 Concerning this, I pleaded with the Lord three times that it would leave me – take it away Lord!. 9 But he said to me, "No – no – no … My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is perfected in weakness."*

What do you do when God says 'no' in life and ministry as you faithfully serve him, as you seek to love and honor him, as you try walk in faith and obedience? What did Paul do?

God Says 'No' So That Paul Might Learn That God's Grace Is Sufficient vv.7-9a

Look carefully at these few verses in vv.7-9. God says 'NO' to Paul's request or to his constant pleading to remove this painful, stabbing thorn in his life, **so that he might learn that God grace is sufficient for him in life** (so that he might learn that the parachute of God's grace is sufficient to bring him through his darkness, sufficient to bring him home). God allows Paul to walk in the valley of darkness, to feel the sharp rocks beneath his feet so that he might learn that God's grace is enough to carry him and sustain him and provide for him through his pain and suffering and struggles!).

Paul Continues To Defend His Leadership vv.1-6

Now – ch.12 is actually part of Paul's defence of his apostleship, his leadership and ministry. And the reason why Paul is defending himself is because the Corinthian church didn't think much of his leadership – they said he writes with power and authority, but in real life Paul isn't very impressive – he hasn't got a commanding presence, his speaking doesn't sound like the influencer speakers of his day , he doesn't have stage presence or a powerful stage persona. On the influencer stage he rates low. In terms of his following – zero. Compared to the influencers of his day his content creation is lacking. And when you look at Paul's life – he's always on the run, wherever he goes he's rejected and persecuted, he's always struggling. His life isn't a picture of power (what people aspire to have), his ministry looks weak.

And the final blow is this one – Paul lacks spiritual experience – he lacks visions and revelations from God … he's spiritually INFERIOR … just as his leadership and ministry and gospel is INFERIOR!

- And so as ch.12 begins Paul says … if you want to boast about spiritual experiences, visions and revelations I can too, but it's of no value, there is nothing to be gained from it. *[1]Boasting is necessary. **It is not profitable – there is no gain doing this**, but I will move on to visions and revelations of the Lord. [2] I know a man in Christ who was caught up to the third heaven fourteen years ago. Whether he was in the body or out of the body, I don't know; God knows. [3] I know that this man—whether in the body or out of the body I don't know; God knows—[4] was caught up into paradise and heard inexpressible words, which a human being is not allowed to speak.*
- Now v.7 will tell us that Paul was that man – he experienced some supernatural vision and revelation from God … And we know from Acts that Paul had quite a number of these supernatural spiritual experiences (Acts 9:12; 16:9-10; 18:9-10; 22:17-21; 23:11; 27:23-24), but he actually chooses not to talk about it, he chooses not to share it, he chooses not to write about it … **Why? Because it's not profitable … there is nothing to be gained from it** … how does it benefit the Corinthians? It doesn't … in fact Paul says, vv.6b-7a, *But I will spare you, so that no one can credit me with something beyond what he sees in me or hears from me, [7] especially because of the extraordinary revelations.* I will not boast in my spiritual experience, in my visions and revelations from God because **all it does it makes me look impressive**, all it does is make me look powerful, all it does is elevate my standing and reputation, **all it does is make me the focus of any sharing or message – it makes me the focal point** - it actually takes away from the gospel as the power of God.

Paul Will Boast Only In His Weakness v.5

Paul says NO – in my leadership and ministry … when I get up to speak, when I get up on the stage, when I post online in the ancient world … it's the gospel that I want to lift up, boast in, parade before others … its power, it's worth, it's beauty … but of myself v.5 – I only want to parade my weakness. *[5]I will boast about a man like that, but I will not boast about myself, except about my weaknesses.* Let me show you what I'd rather parade (let me show you what I'd rather hold up and elevate as an apostle, as a servant of Jesus, in leadership and ministry). When you look at my life, my leadership, my ministry – I want to show you my weakness – not how good or how great I am, but how weak I am!

And so Paul now shares … and what he does is **he parades a crushing weakness God has brought into his life that he has carried for 14 years** – look at v.7, Paul says *a thorn the flesh was given to me* (not some little splinter, or tiny thorn that stabs you as walk through the bush) – NO, it's a 3 inch thorn that's constantly stabbing him, pressing into his side – he calls it *a messenger from Satan to torment him*.

[7b]Therefore, so that I would not exalt myself, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to torment me so that I would not exalt myself. The idea of being tormented is the idea of being afflicted, harassed, brutalized to the point where you can no longer walk, you can no longer continue. Paul says – I have carried this thorn that has caused me so much unbearable pain that I have cried to God constantly for it to be removed – once, twice, three times – I have begged him – v.8, . *[8]I pleaded with the Lord three times that it would leave me, that it would be removed, that it would be taken away from me.*

And here in v.9 is the great purpose of weakness in the Christian life – leadership and ministry – **here is God's great plan and lesson for weakness in leadership and ministry. (REPEAT)** *[9]But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is perfected in weakness."* God brings and allows the thorns, he brings and allows the darkness, he brings me to the point of being so crushed and weak I feel I can't go on … he does it so that I might learn that his grace is enough, his grace is sufficient, **so that I might learn that the parachute of his grace is enough.**

Note: it's important to understand that Paul was not a pushover – he's used to doing it tough, to being physically and emotionally battered, he's used to pain and suffering, he's used to life being out of control, he's used to isolation and rejection – we know what from 2 Cor.11:23-27. So this must have been real bad … because he's pleading, begging God to remove it, to take it away – it's unbearable.) **What is this thorn?** … we don't know – it could be persecution, it could be some spiritual struggle crushing him, it could be emotional (who wouldn't feel depressed in his position going through all he had to endure) We know from ch.1:8-9 Paul struggled to face life, he despaired even of life itself – waking and facing each day was a struggle for him (yes, even for Paul this giant of a Christian who wrote so many of the NT letters). The thorn could be a reference to his physical health, a sickness or a disability that plagued him over and over again. **Whatever it was, it was something that was crushing him – something that he has endured for 14 years as he served God.**

Now there is a movement in vv.7-9 … because notice what Paul says about this thorn – this weakness he endures – this suffering he bears. Look at v.7 again – *[7b]Therefore, so that I would not exalt myself, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to torment me so that I would not exalt myself.* **It was given to keep him from exalting himself – it was given to stop him from thinking too highly of himself – to stop him from becoming conceited and proud as a servant of Jesus, as an apostle of Christ (to stop him from thinking – I'm the man).** And then vv.8-9 … I pleaded with God to remove it and he said NO … so that Paul you might learn that my grace is sufficient for you. Can you see the movement … **Before you can learn the sufficiency of God's grace, before you can learn that the parachute of his grace is enough, you must learn the insufficiency of yourself (repeat) – this is why God has said NO to him …** you must learn that you are not creator but a dependent creature.

Has it every occurred to you – God sometimes allows the darkness to fall in our lives, he sometimes brings us to a place of despair, he brings us to tears so that we learn to not think too highly of ourselves (our ability, our power, our achievements, our wealth, our ministry) – so that we learn that we are insufficient, powerless, weak, helpless, and not in control … **so that we run to him**, so that we look to him to give us strength, so that we rely on his power, so that we rest in his control, **so that we continually lean completely on him!** (and that creaturely dependent posture is echoed in the very prayer Jesus himself taught his disciples to pray in the Lord's prayer – *Father in heaven, give us this day our daily bread – only you can meet my needs … deliver us from evil – only you can protect and keep me safe*)

- I don't know if you realise this - in Psalm 23, we read that the shepherd who leads us to green pastures, the shepherd who is with us beside still waters **is the same shepherd who is with us in the darkness of the valley**. That's the reason why the Psalmist is able to say I will not be afraid, I will fear no evil even though there is no light, **because you are with me**, your rod and your staff they comfort me, they protect me, you're still with me. **The dark valleys are there so that you might learn the insufficiency of yourself and sufficiency of God's grace – so that**

you might learn to lean on and rest in Him. So that you learn to move from independence to dependence. Notice that as parents we want our children to grow up to be independent – in the Christian life growing up is to be more like children who depend more and more on their heavenly Father – because that is the posture of faith, of trust, of dependence – hands outstretched that says – *I need you Lord more today than yesterday … and I will need you more tomorrow than I do today.*

This was Paul's 14 year lesson in humility and weakness as he served the gospel – God has shaken up his life to remind him daily of his **insufficiency** and his need to **depend on God's grace** to carry him at every turn in life. This verse tells me that **even Paul was prone exalting himself (thinking too highly of himself), that he too was prone to pride and self-sufficiency** (if the great apostle Paul was prone to pride and self-sufficiency … if this great spiritual giant was prone to boasting and relying on his own power and strength and experience and achievements - he was a spiritual giant – church planter, preacher, teacher, evangelist, apologist … if he was prone to pride and self-sufficiency we should be sober about ourselves shouldn't we …).

Has it ever occurred to you that sometimes God has to UNRAVEL and UNDO things in our lives before we move in the right direction … sometimes he has to DISMANTLE things in our lives before we run to him. Sometimes God takes away our power, our control, our wealth, our health, our success … even bringing us to failure **so that we begin to learn that we are INSUFFICIENT … and that we need HIM!!!** Sometimes God says no to our prayers … sometimes he allows our world to come crashing down – to humble us so that we start letting go of our earthly securities … so that we stop anchoring in our own power and confidence … so that we stop finding our identity and worth and value in people's praise … so that we stop finding our significance in our work or studies … so that we stop taking pride in our achievements … Sometimes **he rips the ground from under** us so that we learn that we are insufficient and that we need him – his grace, his power, his security, his comfort, his wisdom! That's what we're meant to learn.

God's Grace And Power Is Sufficient For Us In Our Weakness vv.9b-10
And that's exactly why Paul will boast only in his weakness … **because it makes known all the more God's power in his life** (not Paul), it displays all the more God's power in the gospel in his life. It says to everyone – here in the gospel is my anchor, my security, my trust, my hope, my treasure, my power. Look at vv.9-10 - this is what Paul has learnt from God's 'No' n his life – look at v.9. 2 Corinthians 12:9
9 But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is perfected in weakness." Therefore, I will most gladly boast all the more about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may reside in me.

Paul has learnt in his absolute crushing weakness – in the dismantling of his securities in life … in removing the earthly currency that Paul depended on in his life … **Paul learns that God's grace is sufficient to meet his every need.** God's response is, *'my grace is sufficient for you, for my power is perfected in weakness.'* The idea of 'sufficient' is the idea of contentment – of having just enough (Goldilocks and the 3 bears story – father bears porridge was too hot, mother bears porridge was too cold, but baby bears porridge was just right … father bears bed was too hard, mother bears bed was too soft, but baby bears bed was just right …) God grace for Paul in his crushing weakness, in his struggle with the painful thorn in his flesh was 'just right' – **God gave him just enough grace to help him through it – God gave him just enough grace to endure his circumstances … to find rest and peace in his darkness.**

How is God's grace able to do this? Well – because the grace of God is actually powerful! Grace and Power run in parallel – the run side by side - can you see it there in v.9 – look at v.9, '*my **grace** is sufficient for you, for my **power** is perfected in weakness … I will gladly boast all the more about my weakness, so that Christ's power may reside in me.*' **Where do we find God's grace and power?**

We find it in the gospel – in the message of the cross – in Christ crucified. That's what Paul has been saying all through these chapters. The same gospel that saves us … the same gospel that we are to bank

on for power in leadership and ministry and the Christian life … the same gospel we are to boast in and serve, **is the same gospel that has power to sustain us in our every weakness.**

It's the power of the gospel that has helped Paul endure … it's the power of the gospel that sustains him and gives him strength when he feels the sharp end of the razors edge in life … it's the power of the gospel that carries him when he feels like the circumstances are drowning him.

- One of the thing we don't realize about the gospel – the cross, Christ crucified is not just the power of God to save, it's not just the power of God over sin and judgment – the power of God in the gospel **is ultimate seen in the resurrection of Jesus over death.** That's the reason why when Paul speaks of the power of the gospel **he also speaks of the resurrection of Jesus.**
- We read **2 Cor.13:4**, Paul says - Jesus was crucified in weakness, yet **he LIVES** by God's power … in the same way Paul says his ministry and leadership is marked by weakness in Jesus, yet by God's power knowing we will live with Jesus, we carry out our ministry and leadership with great confidence.
- We read in **2 Cor.1:8-9** where Paul is filled with despair – he's can't face life anymore – he's over the edge beyond his ability to endure, but he does endure! How? *We felt we had received the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, **who raises the dead**.* All that has happened, has happened to teach Paul the insufficiency of himself, and the sufficiency of God's power in the gospel – in the power of God who raised Jesus from the dead.
- We read in **2 Cor.4:14** … Paul does not lose heart or lose hope in ministry in spite of the circumstances … Why? *because we know that the who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus …*

The gospel of the death AND resurrection of Jesus is where Paul is anchoring – because there in his death and resurrection – **we see the GRACE and POWER of God**. The grace and power of God in the gospel is where Paul finds his sufficiency. It's not any good if God is gracious but has no power (God would be a powerless grandfather figure, nice but powerless - impotent) … It's also not any good if God is powerful but not gracious (God would be a tyrant – a Vaderlike figure, powerful but not nice at all). The God of the gospel **is both gracious and powerful** – we see grace in the death of Christ for us, we see power in the resurrection of Christ for us.

- **For if Jesus has died for me** – the death I could not die, for the sin I could never pay for, for the judgment I could never bear … **and if he has risen from the dead**, if he has conquered death enemy of enemies, the ultimate suffering, the ultimate loneliness, the ultimate sickness and disease, the ultimate separation that robs me of love … **then he must NOW RULE over every other darkness in my world** … **IF he has shown himself to be for me in his gracious work at the cross and if he now powerfully rules over all then there is no power in life or death that he does not rule over** … there is nothing he is not in control of … my circumstances, my uncertainties in life, my trials, my sickness, the dark valleys I find myself in, the crushing circumstances that are devastating me, the losses that come unexpectedly, the evil that seeks to crush me … **all my weakness are under his grace and power.**
- That's why like Paul, believers in every generation have sung with confidence even in the midst pain, suffering, adversity, evil, sickness and death … *No guilt in life, no fear in death—This is the pow'r of Christ in me; From life's first cry to final breath, Jesus commands my destiny. No pow'r of hell, no scheme of man, Can ever pluck me from His hand; Till He returns or calls me home—Here in the pow'r of Christ I'll stand.*

Over a decade and a half ago I was at a conference overseas where I met an older woman called Mary in her 50's. As we spoke over the evening meal I asked her how she came to faith in the Lord Jesus. And she told me her story. She was around 8 when she lost her mum. And it was just her and her dad. And she said growing up as an only child her greatest fear was that she would lose her dad – because he was fairly elderly and had her late in his life. That was her thorn, her weakness, her struggle – she loved her dad – it was just the two of them in the world. It was an anxiety that grew each year – and then she heard the gospel through a pastor and his family as a 15 year old. It was God's promise to her in the Lord Jesus that won her – his promise to her in Heb.13:5 – *Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you*. God is able to

say that because Jesus has graciously paid for my sin in his death, and his power over death in his resurrection **assures me that he will always hold on to me (grace and power).** She was 15 and she said – the worry, the fear, the anxiety left her. And then the year after – the darkness of the valley came, the thorn pierced her heart – she lost her father. She was 16.

You can run away, you can rage at God, you can reject him, you can fall into hopeless despair, you can run to find your comfort and relief in other things … Mary said to me – in her darkness, even though her heart was broken, even though her future was uncertain, the words she had read that comforted her when she first came to know Jesus, comforted her and sustained and carried her in her grief – never will I leave you, never will I forsake you. She said to me – *that day I knew that **though** I had lost my earthly father, **I knew I would always** have a heavenly father who would never leave me and would always be with me.*

That is how the grace and power of the gospel sustains and carries and keeps us … knowing that he has loved me completely by going to the cross, knowing that he has risen and is powerfully in control over all, and knowing that he is for me and will always be with me gives me just enough comfort, strength, hope, security to keep walking when the darkness falls, when I think I can't go on anymore, when suffering crushes me. Like Paul in v.10 – *for it is when I am weak, then I am strong because of the grace and power of the gospel.* My friend Mary at 16 – a picture of crushing weakness, but a picture of God's grace and power in the gospel sustaining her, keeping her, carrying her.

It was true also for Paul. And that's what Paul has been learning for 14 years – with every trial, as he feels the sharp end of the thorn in his life, as he feels despair as those around him abandon him, as he experiences unexpected change of plans that leaves him alone … it has driven him more and more to depend on God's grace and power in the gospel … it has stopped him from leaning on his own power, strength, ability, wisdom, achievements and running instead to find his confidence and hope in the grace and power of the gospel – looking to Jesus who died and rose again for him … to again and again cling to this truth …

- Paul has learnt from the green pastures to the darkest valleys – the gospel is sufficient, that's where his security lies … **for at the cross** – there I see Jesus thrown into the storm of God's judgment for my sin, swept over and crushed by the waves of God's judgment for my sin – **there is no greater love, see your savior lifted up, he loves me, there grace reigns** … **when I look at the cross I see and know that He loves me**, he is absolutely committed to me even as I feel the fury of life's waves and the battering winds in life, even as I can't see the future … **But as I look at the cross I also see the power of the gospel** – because I see an **EMPTY CROSS – the power of God reigns** – he is risen, the waves could not keep him down, the darkness of the grave could not hold him … and if the one who has died for me is risen, then there is no storm, there is no wave, there is nothing in life or death he is not in control of, there is nothing I am going through that can rob me of his love, his commitment to me, his promises to me … **from life's first cry to final breath Jesus truly commands my destiny** (the grace and power of the gospel tells me in my weakness … **the waves and wind still know his name, but he knows mine and he knows yours!**)
- *No guilt in life, no fear in death—This is the pow'r of Christ in me; From life's first cry to final breath, Jesus commands my destiny. No pow'r of hell, no scheme of man, Can ever pluck me from His hand; Till He returns or calls me home—Here in the pow'r of Christ I'll stand.*

I want to say not just to you Brian, but also to us here this evening - serving Jesus, leadership and ministry, church planting will not always be smooth sailing, you won't always find yourself in the green pastures beside still waters – there will be times when you'll find yourself in a place of weakness at some point if not already. As you seek to serve him, you'll meet adversity, there will be some of you who will only experience moments of pain and suffering – others will carry much more; some of you will face great tragedy; some of you will go through great loss – the loss of someone you love …; a routine visit to the doctor will reveal terminal cancer in your life; people you trust might disappoint you or abandon you, the people you serve for years might one day reject you; your marriage might fail; the people or ministries you invest in might fall apart … the dark valleys will come, the thorns will present themselves

in those moments … and you'll ask God to deliver you, to remove your thorn, to lift the darkness … and there will be times he will say NO.

I want to say to you this evening is that God will often say 'no' – and he does it, not to be spiteful, not to be hurtful, not because he has abandoned you, not because he doesn't care - **he does it so that you might learn to depend on his grace and power in Jesus more and more**, so that we might learn that we are weak and insufficient, and that God's grace and power in Jesus who died for us and is risen is enough to carry and sustain us.

- Christian leadership and ministry shaped by the gospel of Christ crucified will unavoidably be marked by weakness, suffering, rejection … **because in parading our weakness we are highlighting our insufficiency, and the sufficiency of God's grace and power in Jesus alone to keep us, to sustain us, to strengthen us, to empower us**. It's saying to all around you - that's where my power, my strength, my hope, my comfort lies … in His grace and power … **in knowing that he is graciously for you** (there is no one who loves you and is more committed to you than Jesus – he died for you) … and **in knowing that he powerfully rules over all** (there is nothing he is not in control of – there is no one more in control over all that's happening – today and tomorrow, my present and my future is safe in his powerful hands – he is risen)! That's why Paul says, 2 Corinthians 12:10, *10 So I take pleasure in weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and in difficulties, for the sake of Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*

Has it occurred to you that all our weaknesses are opportunities to make much of the grace and power of God in the gospel – Brian - just as your ministry banks on the gospel of Christ crucified as the power of God to save; just as your confidence and approval in life is to be found only in serving the gospel; your weaknesses also serve to make much of the grace and power of God in the gospel! Which is also why Brian you must keep preaching the gospel – it's what you need to keep preaching to yourself and it will always be what the flock under your care need most. And preaching the gospel according to Paul is going to be accompanied by hardship.

2 Timothy 4:1–5 (CSB), *I solemnly charge you before God and Christ Jesus, who is going to judge the living and the dead, and because of his appearing and his kingdom: 2 Preach the word, the gospel of God's grace and power; be ready in season and out of season; correct, rebuke, and encourage with great patience and teaching. … there will be people who will not list and who may even oppose it … 5 But as for you, exercise self-control in everything, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry – keep preaching the gospel brother.*

Friends, sometimes God says no, he allows hardship in our lives, so that you and I might learn that his grace and power in gospel IS sufficient – so that I might turn to him, so that I might rest in him, so that I might find my comfort in him, so that I might find my identity in him, so that I might find my worth in him, so that I might find my security in him, so that I might find my confidence and hopes in him. **So that I might learn that the parachute of his grace and power is enough.**

Conclusion

The Pilgrim's Progress is the story of the Christian life written by John Bunyan. John Bunyan was a preacher of the gospel in England who was imprisoned in 1658. Refusing to be silent he would preach the gospel in the jail courtyard – not only did he now have a captive audience every day … people from all around Bedford prison where he was, and all around the area people would come to the prison and stand outside it's walls each day to hear Bunyan preach (stand outside and hear him preach). And so what they did next was they placed him in a cell deep within the walls of the prison to silence him for the next 12 years. And there he wrote The Pilgrim's Progress – the story of the Christian life – a reflection of where John Bunyan would find his joy, security, confidence, hope in the darkness of his imprisonment, in his weakness where he would find his power to endure, grace to keep persevering. And for the 300 years after Bunyan this book – the Pilgrim's Progress would be the most widely read and translated book after the Bible.

In the book – the main character – a man named Christian is on a journey – and as he journeys he faces trial, adversity, temptation, loss, hardship, fear, opposition, threats – just like the Christian life. In fact on the journey Christian makes mistakes, he takes detours, he looks for short cuts, he avoids difficulty … and almost always ends up in disaster. His only friend on the journey with him sinks in the sinking sand of despondence. Christian falls to worldly temptation. He sinks into depression and considers ending his life – and constantly tosses with the idea of giving up his quest, his journey, his walk. Life is overwhelming. He comes to a point where he is so weak he just wants to give up. At such moments, Mr. Hopeful appears and assures him – *'be of good cheer (be strong) my brother, for I feel the bottom, I feel the ground, and it is sound, it is firm.'*

And Christian walks on. Each trial, adversity, temptation, loss, hardship, fear, opposition, threat … **weakness is there so that Christian might learn that he is standing on solid ground** – the thorns and darkness that come into our lives are there so that we might learn that God's grace and power to us in Jesus is enough – each step is a lesson in our insufficiency and his sufficiency … every step in your weakness is a step towards knowing that he is sufficient – **towards knowing that the gospel is solid ground, it is sound, it is firm – Brian … may you always rest in the grace and power of the gospel.**

May your leadership and ministry always boast in weakness because when you are at your weakest you're meant to find in the gospel that the ground is sound, firm, strong – **may your insufficiency lead you to find your sufficiency always in God's grace and power in the gospel.** May those around you see that though you are weak – you've found your sufficiency – your power to love, to persevere, to serve, in Christ alone … in his grace and power … may all see that He alone is your solid ground.

Pray

- We thank you that at the cross grace reigns – for when we see your son dying for us, we know you love us. But we also thank you that when we look at the cross we see an empty cross – your power reigns over all – you rule over all, you are in control even when we find ourselves in the valley of darkness.
- We thank you that because of Jesus we need not fear the dark … we thank you because in our weakness, our despair, our pain and even in our suffering we need not be afraid – your grace and power will always be sufficient.
- Help us to always anchor in your grace and power – help us remember that you still command the wind and waves today – they know your name. But more than anything else help us remember that because of Jesus, you know ours.
- Help us find in the gospel always our solid ground.
- Help us sing always with confidence so that from the green pastures to the darkest valley – all might see that you are our solid ground … Help us sing with confidence …
- *No guilt in life, no fear in death—This is the pow'r of Christ in me; From life's first cry to final breath, Jesus commands my destiny. No pow'r of hell, no scheme of man, Can ever pluck me from His hand; Till He returns or calls me home—Here in the pow'r of Christ I'll stand.*