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2 Corinthians 12:1-10

“Boasting of Weakness”

#5 in Series: Real Trouble – Real Hope

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Are you ever boastful? Do you ever go on and on about your kids, or your grandkids, and how wonderful they are? Maybe you boast sometimes about your pets, or your church, or your favorite sports team. I know a guy who boasts about the Ohio State football team. You would think he personally coached the team, trained them, and led them to all of their victories by himself. And, no, I don't think I'm the least bit jealous as a Michigan fan of the many reasons he has to be boastful.

Actually, I was boastful, I have to admit, here at church. Several weeks ago I was playing basketball with some of the guys from church on a Saturday morning. We had a low turnout, so it was just two-on-two. The other team was stacked – two great shooters and athletes. My teammate, Rob Bailey, and I? Not so great, not so athletic. We expected to get creamed. But then my partner got hot. Rob couldn't miss. He started shooting the lights out, and I just kept feeding him the ball and getting in the way of the other team. We crushed the opponents in consecutive games, and even though I had been of absolutely no help, I boasted loudly about my teammate's remarkable performance. “He's the LeBron James of Hope Lutheran Church,” I crowed.

And may I just say, I don't think Rob's been back out on the court since that day. I believe he may be retiring after that miraculous performance.

Now, boasting on the basketball court is all in fun. But boasting can get us in trouble, can't it? Boasting can turn

others off, and damage our relationships. I find it fascinating, then, that when we open our Bibles to 2 Corinthians 12, we see where St. Paul is spending some time boasting. Paul, the missionary apostle sent by Jesus to bring the Gospel to the Gentiles, boasts about – and this sounds crazy – but he boasts about his weaknesses.

*“Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 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” (12:9b-10).*

Wow! That is some weird boast. Isn't it? How many of you have ever boasted of your weaknesses? It's hard enough to endure life's real troubles, and to survive them. It's even harder to remain content, and to keep a joyful attitude, despite our life struggles. But I have never yet met a Christian like St. Paul, who can honestly say, “I am boasting of my weaknesses.”

I don't know about you, but I'm not exactly right there with St. Paul. Are you? I don't like being weak. I'm not content with calamities and hardships. When I'm going through some of life's real troubles, I want them over with! I want to see them fixed, resolved! The only time I'm happy with my weaknesses is when I see them in the rear view mirror.

When it comes to boasting about weaknesses, how many of you are honestly more like me than you are like St. Paul? Well, maybe we'll get to his level of faith and humility someday.

But here's something that all of us can grab hold of today. Whether you're going through one or two little tiny troubles, or whether you're facing a whole pile of real and nasty

troubles, God's Word has an critical, awesome message for you today.

It's right there in verse 9. Paul tells us that he was going through some kind of a physical ailment, some real-life bodily trouble that he was experiencing. A "thorn in the flesh," he calls it. *"Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me,"* he writes. And we can all understand that, right? Paul had a sprained ankle, or a speech impediment, or a sore back – something that was making his missionary travels painful. So he begged God, as we all would do, for real relief from his real troubles.

And what was God's answer? The Lord spoke to Paul, and these are words that all of us need to take to heart. *"My grace,"* God declares, *"is sufficient for you ...."*

*"My grace is sufficient for you."* What a profound concept! What a powerful realization for us to cling to! When we've got health problems that won't go away, when life isn't working out the way we want it to, God says to us, "I've got your back. I'll take care of you. My grace is sufficient for you." Do you hear that promise? Do you trust it? Can you live by it?

When the bad guys seem to be winning, when the lousy days outnumber the happy days, when our prayers aren't being answered the way we expect, when those "thorns in the flesh" are sticking us fiercely, God says to us, "It will be alright. Your life is so much more than what you're experiencing in the here and now. I will see you through this life, and bring you to eternal life. Here's my promise. My grace is sufficient for you." Do you hear that promise? Do you trust it? Can you live by it?

When you're tired of sinning, tired of sin's effects on your life, tired of sin's influence in society and in your own family ... when you're burdened with guilt, and wondering if you're really forgiven ... God says to you, "You are forgiven. And evil will never win out, in the end. My Son, Jesus Christ, won the final victory on Good Friday and Easter Sunday; and, yes, my grace is sufficient for you on this day!" Do you hear that promise? Do you trust it? Can you live by it?

We may not have perfect health. We may not have perfect faith. We not live in a perfect society, or in perfect families, or have perfect jobs. But we have, through faith in Christ, God's perfect grace. And that is enough to keep real hope alive in our hearts. God's grace is enough to see us through our real troubles. God's grace is sufficient for our times of weakness and our days of struggle.

Maybe we're not ready to boast of our weaknesses, as St. Paul did. But, with Paul, we cling today with all our heart and soul to God's incredible, extraordinary assurance. God's promise to you, today – hear it, trust it, live by it. *"My grace is sufficient for you!"* Amen.