

2 Corinthians 12:1-10

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[0:00] Turn with me to 2 Corinthians chapter 12, 2 Corinthians chapter 12. It is a joy just to continue making our way through the book of 2 Corinthians with one another. This morning we are starting in chapter 12.

We will be looking at verses 1 through 10. We have been for some days now, for some weeks and probably months, I'd have to go back and look. I know it's been a number of months looking through 2 Corinthians.

While I'm here, I want to say we are making a transition in our church website and I'm excited about that. I know there's a lot of work that is going on. It needed to happen because I'm the one who set up the initial one.

And when God brought talented and gifted people that say they love IT stuff, I said, boy, I've been praying for you for a number of years. But I want to thank those who are maintaining the one now, working on those who are coming up later.

I know they don't want me to call them by name. But I don't know if you realize it or not. I didn't realize it. They're getting ready to change the way our sermons are on the website. It's going to be completely different.

[1:02] And those working on it said, you know, I look back and it was 530 something sermons that are on the church's website. And they're having to go through each one of those and categorize them by books.

So now you'll be able to, in the future, you'll be able to go back and say, I want to go back to the book of Romans. And you can listen to that series. So praise the Lord for talented people who say they love that. And praise the Lord for those who do all that.

Because every one of those sermons that were uploaded were also edited before they went on our website. Because on the website, they don't have the singing. It doesn't have any of that. It's just the sermon. So I'm so thankful. I know quite often.

Paul says we give more honor to the less seen parts of the body. And I understand what he's talking about because I give honor to where honor is due. I have the privilege of standing before you. Most people know who I am.

But I am so thankful for those who serve and those who work and those who labor. And, Ms. Lynn, the day is coming when you stand up and you kick that bench behind you and you start tearing that piano up.

[1:58] I told you that about five years ago. It's coming. You're going to glory. Hallelujah. You're going to, I'll fly away on that one day, and it's coming. I know it is. And it's okay. There's nothing wrong with that.

I'll wear purple that day, and we'll line it up. All right. Let's stand together. If you are physically able, let's all stand together as we read the word of God found in 2 Corinthians 12, starting in verse 1.

Paul, writing to the church at Corinth, says, Boasting is necessary, though it is not profitable, but I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord. I know a man in Christ who 14 years ago, whether in the body I do not know or out of the body I do not know, God knows, such a man was caught up to the third heaven.

And I know how such a man, whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows, was caught up into paradise and heard inexpressible words which a man is not permitted to speak.

On behalf of such a man, I will boast. But on behalf, I will not boast except in regard to my weaknesses. For if I do wish to boast, I will not be foolish, for I will be speaking the truth.

[3:01] But I refrain from this so that no one will credit me with more than he sees in me or hears from me. Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me, to keep me from exalting myself.

Concerning this, I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me. And he has said to me, My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness. Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.

Therefore, I am well content with weakness, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Let's pray. Father, we thank you so much that we have had this glorious opportunity to be together. Father, we thank you that we can lift up our voices in song, that we can greet one another in fellowship.

But Father, we praise you that we have the opportunity now to come to the Word of God. As we have read it and we've heard it and we've seen it, we pray that now by the power and presence of the Spirit of God that you would speak into our hearts and minds. We pray that the truth would captivate us.

[4:14] That it would not be a collection of information, Lord, or even a turning our attention to, but Lord, it would be a committing our lives to the Word. And that we would live it out for your glory and honor and yours alone. And we ask it all in Christ's name.

Amen. You may be seated. As we've been making our way through the book of 2 Corinthians, we'll reintroduce it for you very quickly. I do not have time, nor will I take the time to give you a deep introduction.

But you know that Paul is writing to the church in contrast to the first letter where he is rebuking and correcting sins that were prevalent within the church. In writing the second letter to the church at Corinth, which many believe was probably the third because he references what we call a lost letter, though we know it's not lost because what is in the Word of God was declared by the Word of God, by the God of the Word.

Right? So we have all that God wants us to know. But Paul is writing to the church and he is not rebuking, not correcting, but he is encouraging. And he's encouraging the church, we continue to say it, to live out an authentic faith.

That is, if they believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and have committed their life and they name him as Savior, then he wants them to live that out in everyday affairs and everyday life and he wants them to live it out authentically.

[5:26] We don't segment or separate portions of our life and we don't have the holy and the sacred because in Christ all things have become holy, right? All things have been new. We don't separate it and say, well, that over there is worldly and this over here is godly.

No. He has made us his people in this world for his glory. So he's writing the church. He's encouraging them to live it out authentically. Now, we've went through a lot of this and near these chapters where we're at now, Paul has had to at least validate his own concern for the church.

The church has been led away and led astray by people who would give pretense to devotion by a display of external factors. That's a long way of saying people would come in and say, well, we will know you're committed to Christ if you'll do this or you'll follow these laws or you'll follow these rules and we give you all these legalistic things.

And you put a check mark beside them, then you're doing right. I got a news flash for you. That's already been tried. We can go back before the cross and we can see how good that works out for man.

And what we find is Paul says, there is none righteous. No, not one. We have all desperately fallen short of the glory of God. Because no matter how long the list nor how short the list. Friend, listen to me. It takes ten commandments to find us guilty before a holy God.

[6 : 44] God could have fleshed it out and given us more than that. But the ten commandments or the decalogue as it's referred to, in ten great sayings of God, each one of us are found guilty.

Now the Jewish people took the ten commandments and made 634 legalistic laws of how to define these ten commandments. Because man wants to say, well God says I shouldn't steal, what does steal mean?

And we begin to define it. God said I shouldn't work on the Sabbath. Well what does that mean? Because what is work? Can I carry a coffee cup and walk nine miles as long as I don't carry anything over that and go ten miles?

That's what actually happened, right? They wanted to know, what do you mean by not working? What do you mean by not doing this? Because that's exactly how we are today. Right, we say, what can I get away with?

How much can I do and still be innocent? Paul says it's not that. An authentic faith says that I'm living in relation with Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior.

[7 : 40] He dictates every portion, every part, and every aspect of my life. So if I can do that in relation with him, if I can take him with me while I'm toting that coffee cup, and if he leads me to go that extra mile, as he says, and he leads me to do something which may be defined as work, like reaping the grain on the Sabbath because I'm hungry, then it's okay because he is Lord of the Sabbath, right?

And Sabbath was made for man because man needs rest. It was made for God because God does not need rest. He does not grow tired, nor does he grow weary, the scripture tells us.

So we begin to understand that it is an authentic relational faith more than a do this, don't do that faith. We can stop right here and say some of us have tried to build our relation with Jesus Christ based on rules and regulations.

What we can and what we cannot do and how far we should go and how far we should not go. Friends, stop that. Jesus Christ has called you to come into relationship with him. He wants to be the great lover and guardian of your soul, and he wants you to live out an authentic faith that declares to you that he loves you, right?

Because there's no name like his name. We will fall prostrate for those of us who know him before his throne one day and declare that because what a wonderful, merciful Savior. But in the midst of that, as Paul has been saying, well, if you want validation of external appearances, he said, then I have it.

[9 : 01] If we go back, we can look at the chapters before this and we can say, Paul says, I'm a Jew of the Jews. I mean, I'm a Pharisee of the Pharisees. When it comes to rules, I had them. When it came to regulations, I did them.

I sat under the greatest teachers. I am not only a Jewish by birth, I'm also a Roman citizen by birth. That's a double blessing for his time, right? Paul says, I've had all these things.

He said, trials and tribulations. Hey, if you want to know if I'm really a believer in Jesus Christ and you want to say, have you suffered? He said, I've been shipwrecked. I've been tossed to sea. I've been beaten. I've been stoned.

I've been left for dead. I have all of these things that have been done to me. But I got to, you know, he says, I got something else to tell you. He doesn't really say it this way, so I'm just going to give me a little bit of freedom.

There are other people that are beaten, that are stoned, that are shipwrecked. All those other things that Paul says, someone else can say, well, I've done that too. There were, as Jesus was teaching on the Sermon on the Mount, the scariest passage of Scripture that I think I will ever find is when Jesus says that there will be many who come to him that day and say, Lord, Lord, did we not cast out demons in your name?

[10:08] I mean, think about that. They did exorcists in his name. Lord, Lord, did we not heal the sick in your name? Lord, Lord, did we not do all these great things in your name?

And Jesus says, and I will say to them, depart from me, for I never knew you. See, it's not about what you have and what you have not done. It's not what you do even in his name.

It's not even about how big of a price you have paid for his name. The standard is, what relationship are we in with the Savior? And it's where Paul gets to this now, this boasting.

Paul said, I can boast. Hey, it's family worship, and I love it. I know you parents don't. It's okay. I shared with some earlier, and I don't ever like to call it.

I'm not calling anybody. I said, you know, the reason I love family worship is because when I started pastoring, at that time we had three, now we have four, but our youngest one at that time was less than a year old.

[11:06] So from that point on, my wife, for all intents and purposes, on Sundays has been a single mother. And if there was junior church, she was the junior church teacher, and I said, I'd rather preach with you present.

And then Miss Tricia was there too, so depending on whose kids would act up, they would just take turns taking them back and forth. And so I kind of, you know, had a heart for that, to understand, well, that's my kids that are getting in trouble, or that's my kids.

It's okay. The kids don't bother me. Okay? They do not bother me. And some of you parents say, well, they're bothering me. That's what they're supposed to do, their kids. They do a fantastic job at it. And the Lord, hey, I got a passage for you.

We're talking about thorns. Right here, let's introduce it. Right here you go. So I want to talk to you this morning. I want you to see what the Word of God has to say about living with thorns. Living with thorns.

And we don't, and all joking aside, we do not mean our children because they're blessings. The Bible tells us they're like arrows in the hand of a warrior. They are blessing.

[12:02] And blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them. What a blessing children are. But I want you to see this morning, Paul is shifting his boasting from talking about who he is to talking about who his Savior is.

And in the midst of that, he declares to us how we should live and even expect to live with thorns. Paul says boasting is necessary.

Paul is not saying boasting is necessary because it is something the Lord commanded. He had said before this, this is not what Jesus would say, but this is how man operates. So to meet men at that level at times, we have to meet them where they're at.

Paul says, so I will boast a little bit. I'll brag a little bit. But he says, I'm not going to brag and boast about everything I've done. Paul's focus shifts on a 180. And he goes from talking about the things he's accomplished and even the things he's suffered to the things that he's learned and the things that he's seen.

And he begins to boast about revelations and visions. And in this, he begins to get to this point of humility where God humbles the man of God and the people of God, and he calls them to live with a consistent life.

[13:08] Number one, I want you to notice the legitimacy of its need. The thorns and sometimes hindrances are necessary for the people of God.

Now, let's be careful here. I want to just be clear. I believe too often we say, well, that's just a thorn in my flesh, where sometimes the thorn is something we're sticking in. It's called sin.

Now, if it's a sin which we have the ability and authority and the power to overcome, don't call it a thorn. Call it what it is. Right? This is a sin which is easily ensnaring me, and I have been given the mind of Christ and the will of Christ, and I have been given the heart of Christ, and I've been given the authority of Christ.

I need to cast that thing off. So don't define as a thorn something that really is a choice. But there are some things that we have no choice over. There are some things that are left present among us.

He says, I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord. What a wonderful thing to move on to, right? We don't talk about rules and regulations. He says, I know a man in Christ who 14 years ago, now, Paul is talking about himself.

[14:15] We don't know exactly when this happened, but if you date it based upon the dating of this letter, this was probably around 43 A.D. So real early in church life, real early in church world, more than likely, people say that it could have been when he was actually stoned and left for dead.

Remember that cool story where Paul is preaching Christ, and the reason Paul actually gets stoned is because he is exalting the Savior, and people are being healed in this town, and the people want to declare that Paul is a god, and he says, I'm not a god.

Don't worship me. And the town folk get so upset because Paul doesn't want to be a god that they stone him, and they kill him, and they leave him for dead, and they go back home, and he's out there, and for all intents and purposes, they think he's dead, and disciples are gathered around him, and then it says, and Paul got up, and he went back into town, and he stayed the night, and then he left the next days.

People believe that that is probably when this event happened. Paul doesn't know if it was in the body or out of the body. He doesn't know. He just knows that all of a sudden, he is in the presence of the Savior, and it is here that he wants to boast.

It is here that he wants to declare some glorious things. He talks of an individual who is himself, and we'll find out later why he doesn't just say I, why it's not all about me, me, me, me, me, right?

[15:27] Because, by the way, a true revelation of the Lord is always a revelation of the Lord given to man. It's not a revelation of man. It's a revelation of the Lord. It's not about man, but it's for man.

So we have to be careful where we put our focus. We have to be careful where we understand, say, well, this is all about me. No, if God is imparting a truth to you, if you open up the word of God, and you begin to see things anew and afresh, God is blessing you with a revelation.

He's revealing his character. Sometimes we think, and I know I can be a little long-winded this morning, but it's okay. It's been a couple weeks since I've been in the pulpit, right? We think that revelations have to be a burning bush experience.

Some revelations are a crowing rooster. Some revelations are a burning bush. Some are a talking donkey. Some are, you go on throughout scripture, right? In various manners and in various ways, it tells us in the book of Hebrews, God spoke to his people.

But then what does it say? But in these last days, he has spoken to us through Jesus Christ, his son. You know, you know one great revelation, and that is a really, we're going full circle here. Watch out. It is a relationship with Jesus Christ because he begins, and then he tells you that the spirit dwells within you, and he reveals to you all that Jesus has said.

- [16 : 43] So revelations now are not walking around looking for bushes that are burning, that are not consumed. We're not looking for donkeys that talk when they shouldn't. We're not looking for staffs that become serpents.

We're looking to the Savior, and we're looking to Jesus himself and trusting the spirit to give us insight into the word of God. So when you open up your scripture, and all of a sudden, things begin to jump off the page.

Friend, it's not because you're getting smarter. It's because there's a revelation coming to you, and it's about the Lord. It's a revelation of the Lord. You know, I remember the first time when I finally told myself, hey, I'm going to commit to reading through the Old Testament.

I'm going to commit to preaching through the Old Testament. And I was going back through the Old Testament, and things just started showing up. Everywhere I look in the Old Testament, I see the Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Everywhere.

In every sacrifice. In every ordinance. In every commandment. I just keep meeting him over and over and over and over. We're seeing revelations of the Lord.

- [17 : 46] And it's all about him. And we see man intertwined there. We see man doing some cool stuff there. We see man doing some awful things. We see man involved. But it's really, when we read the Old Testament, it's not about man.

Right? It is the revelation of the Lord God to man for his glory. He says it, even in the prophetic books. He says, I'm casting you out of the land.

And I'm casting you out of the land so that the nations may know you didn't obey me. And they can go, wow, look at that. He says, but don't worry. I'll bring you back into the land. And again, it's not because you need to be back in the land.

So that the same nations who saw your discipline can see your reconciliation and restoration. And they'll be like, wow, there's not only a God who disciplines, but there's a God who restores. Isn't that good?

It's about him. It's not about the nation. It's not about any people. It's what he's doing in that people to declare his glory and his worth. Because the world thinks there's a big mean God up there who's going to judge you.

- [18 : 46] God says, I am holy. There is a standard. But I am a God of restoration. I am a God of redemption. I am a God of, you know, recognizing my glory and honor. And he shows that through his people.

Don't get caught up in reading your Bible thinking you're reading the story of man. There are great historians that you can read the story of man. And they're really not that good. But, I mean, I'm not saying that the books aren't that good.

Man's not good. But when we read here the history of God's interactions with man, we begin to be moved. So we see this reality. And we see the legitimacy of this.

So Paul says that he saw this great vision. He says, on behalf of that man, I would boast. He said, oh, if I was that man, I would be puffed up. I would boast. I would declare because he said, I was called up to the third heavens.

What does that mean in Jewish thought? Well, there was the heavens and the air, which is where the birds flew. You know, there's the heavens in the sky. And then there's the heavens, what we refer to as the ozone. And the third heavens is up above all of that.

[19:43] So he said, I know a man that was called above all of that. He was called into the presence of God. He was called before his throne. He says he was called in paradise. He said, if it was me, I would boast in that man.

He said, if I was that man, he is speaking kind of third person here. He said, I would brag. Well, what keeps Paul from boasting? Look at what he says. He says, I don't want to speak too much because I want to refrain from this so that no one will credit me with more than what he sees in me or hears from me.

Paul said this was something that was personal. This was something that took place. But I don't want anybody to think more of me. You can just look at me and tell that I am flesh and bone. He goes on.

He goes a little bit further. He says, because of the surpassing greatness of the revelation for this reason, in case you don't think it's Paul, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh.

Here is the legitimacy of its need. Paul says, the greater revelations and knowledge of the Lord and Savior we have, we ought to expect greater thorns to keep us humble.

[20:49] Too many times we think that if we know more and more and more of the Savior that things will get easier. The reality is, is that the more the Lord God entrusts to us to show of himself, quite often the enemy goes to work and there are things that remind us that we are but human.

Lest we exalt ourselves. The legitimacy of the need is, Paul said, I stood before the Savior.

I stood in the presence of the throne room. And if it was left to myself, I would not be quiet about it. I would brag and boast about it. And I would tell everybody about it. Because others may be shipwrecked, but not everybody's been there.

Others may be stoned, but not everybody's been there. But to keep me from being prideful, to keep me from self-exaltation, I was given a thorn.

See, sometimes the reality is, is that God wants to be humble. He wants to entrust us with greater revelations. He wants to entrust us with greater visions. I'm not talking about things that are extra biblical. I'm talking about things that are of the Lord.

[21:57] He wants to entrust us with a greater knowledge of himself. But entrusting us with that, he also wants to ensure that we do not get prideful. That we do not get self-exaltation. That we do not begin to put ourselves up on a podium.

That we do not begin to cause other people to think that we're something special. Because the messenger is just that. He is just a broken vessel that is being used for the glory of the Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ.

But we are given these thorns to remind us that we are utterly dependent upon him. We need to be entrusted with a greater knowledge of him.

We need to be entrusted with a greater understanding of him. Because the world desperately needs to hear it. But friend, you don't have to look very far. Because you can look even through modern day church records. And in today's day and time on the internet, you can Google search it.

You can find individual after individual after individual after individual has fallen so hard off that podium. In which they were put upon either by themselves or by others. And the reason they fall is because of this thing called pride.

[22:58] But God says, but I will give you a thorn to keep you humble. But you have to let it stay. Praise God that he reminds us that we are weak. Praise God that he reminds us that we are independent.

Here is the legitimacy of its need. We need it. Number two, we see the limitations of its impact. Because when the thorn is there, we don't want it. We don't need it and it is not pleasant.

Now I cannot tell you what that thorn is. We don't really know what it was in Paul's life. Many have speculated and many have tried to figure it out. But we need to stop right there. Because it is left unmentioned intentional.

Because we would like to say, well, at least I don't have that. Something that God uses to remind us of our humanity. Something that God uses to remind us of our weakness and our dependence. Whatever that is, that's the thorn.

Again, it is not the sin that we choose. But it is something that remains. Many of you know I had back surgery about nine years ago now. And I always tell people I'd love to say it was something cool when my back finally ruptured.

[24:00] Now there's definitely a thorn in the flesh. It reminds me I shouldn't pick up things anymore like I used to. I always say I love that. As every guy, I wish I had a really cool story to say I did it. But I was sound asleep in my bed at two o'clock in the morning and it ruptured.

I don't know what I was doing in my sleep, but I fell out of the bed. Nothing cool about that, right? But what God did is he put me on my face for a number of times. And he reminded me that in my own strength and in my own power, I was absolutely dependent upon him.

And I could take that a step further. That was exactly the moment in my life where I was praying about where God wanted me to pastor. For about three years prior to that, I knew he was moving me from where I was at formerly.

And I was really dependent. I said, maybe I'll just stay here. Maybe I'll do this. I can do this. And there was a lot about me. But it was during that time that the Lord put this church on my heart. And after I could stand upright again and I felt like maybe I could preach in view of a sermon, preach in view of a call, I decided to submit to your pastor's church committee here with that confirmation.

So the whole time you've known me, I've had a hole in my back to remind me I'm dependent upon him. We have thorns, whatever they are. But we understand they are limited.

[25:16] Look at what he says. He says, Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations for this reason to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh. Friend, listen to me.

It says there was given me. That is, Paul says, the one who loves me gave it to me. Be not deceived. All good things come from the Lord God.

It tells us. Everything flows through his hand or across his face. He has either actively given to you or he permits it to be present in your life.

So we need to understand that whatever comes to the children of God has first passed the wise counsel of our Father. And therefore, our Father will not give us something we cannot bear.

Which this, all of a sudden, should begin to define the limitations. Because if we say, oh God, you're giving me more than I can handle, that's not a true statement. Because he tells us that in Christ, we will not be tempted nor tested greater than we can handle.

[26:18] But we would find our escape and release in him. But he says that he's given this. But look at what he says. He says it's a thorn in the flesh.

I believe it was Charles Spurgeon who pointed this out first. And we ought to stand amazed at this. Notice where the thorn is. And that defines for you the limitations of it. Paul says the visions and revelations.

I don't know if they were in the flesh or in the spirit. I don't know if he was in the body or if he was just there. But the visions and revelations that had so exalted him was a spiritual encounter of spirit and truth.

It was a reality that took place in the spirit. It was a speaking to his soul. But the hindrance that was given was in his flesh. Notice that. It is a thorn in the flesh.

That is, it could penetrate no further. And it could go no deeper. It may hinder him on the outside. But it could not affect him on the inside. Friend, listen to me. The only time a thorn begins to affect us internally in our spirit is when we give it too much attention.

[27 : 19] Keep it in its rightful place. We see the limitations of its impact. Because he says this is a thorn in the flesh. Third and finally, I want you to see here the lessons from its presence.

If a holy father who loves us dearly, and he loves us while we were yet sinners so much that he gave his son for us, then if he chooses to give us something or permit something to come to us, there has to be a reason.

Read the book of Job. We do not know the reason until the end. Where Job finally has to say, I put my hand over my mouth and I stand in the presence of a holy God who knows greater than I. But we understand if God gives us something or permits something to exist in our lives, then it must be there for a reason.

Paul says, I cried out three times. And each time God said no. It has to be there. And look at what he says. He says, and he said to me, my grace is sufficient for you.

We do not know the sufficiency of his grace until we stand in desperate need of it. Here is one lesson as we learn how great and grand the grace of God is.

[28 : 33] For power, he says, is perfected in weakness. Therefore, we understand that the power that flows through us is not a power of us because we are weak. So that anything that comes through us must be given to him.

Power, his great power is perfected in weakness. And then Paul says, so most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast. That is, I will rather praise or I will rather exalt. So what this does, another lesson the thorn teaches us, is it takes us to a greater level of praise.

It's wonderful when you can praise him on the mountaintop, but you're really learning some things when you can praise him down in the shadow of the valley. It's great when you can offer praise when everything is going well.

But it's greater still when you can praise him for the things that are hindering you. And when you can begin to praise a father who loves you and you can say, father, I want to give you all the praise for this hindrance, this thorn in my flesh.

That is, as we say, another level. So we see that we're learning the sufficiency of his grace. We're learning the power of his presence. We're learning the praise that is matured through trials and struggles and temptations.

[29 : 39] And then he says, I'm also learning in verse 10, therefore, I am well content. We learn contentment. Oh, that's something we don't really want to learn that much, right?

How many of us pray, Father, make me content? He says, with food and covering, I'm content. He says, I'm learning contentment because I cannot be and do everything that I want to be and do.

And there's this thorn that keeps hindering me and keeps holding me back, but I'm learning to be content. He says, I am well content. And look at what he's content with. Weakness, insult, distress, persecution, difficulties.

But he's content to do it for Christ. We say, oh, I'll do anything for you, Lord, but this, this, this, this, or this. Those thorns that are given there are so that we can say, I'll do whatever it is, Lord, for your sake.

And finally, he says, for when I am weak, then I am strong. Paul says, I'm learning more and more and more that it's not really about me. Because we know that strength is the strength of Christ in his life.

[30:51] Friends, sometimes we're called to live with thorns. Those thorns are legitimate. They need to be there. Those thorns have limitations. Don't let them go further than they're supposed to. But in those thorns, we're learning great lessons.

And that is, we're learning how to walk in relationship with the Lord and Savior who loves us dearly. Let's pray. Father, we thank you so much for this day. Father, we thank you that we have the opportunity together with brothers and sisters in Christ.

And right now, as we pause and pray, I don't know what each one's going through. I don't know each struggle. I don't know each trial. Lord, some of us, we have sin that we need to cast off.

Let us not define as a thorn something that we make a choice about. So if by the conviction of the Spirit we understand that, Lord, help us to come before you and ask for deliverance from the thing that we're allowing to entangle and snare us.

Some, maybe they don't know you as Lord and Savior of their lives. Maybe through the singing of the songs and the hearing of the Word, you're bringing conviction to their heart.

[31:58] And they say, Lord, I need to turn to you. Would today be the day they talk to someone? And some of us, Lord, we just need to be content with what you've given us. So may we find that perfect piece of contentment that passes all understanding where we realize it's not about us, but it's about you.

So, Father, however you're speaking to us, we ask that you would speak clearly now and help us not to rush past this time of being before you and with you. And we ask it all in Christ's name.

Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

[35:08] Amen.