



SHE DON'T LOOK LIKE WHAT SHE WENT THROUGH!

A Testament to God's Sufficient Grace



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RODMAN STREET CHURCH
REMEMBERING DEACONESS BARBARA FAIR
3.7.26

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2 CORINTHIANS 12:7-10

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Title: She Doesn't Look Like What She Went Through: A Testament to God's Sufficient Grace

Sermon Summary: This powerful message centers on 2 Corinthians 12:7-10, where Paul speaks about his thorn in the flesh and God's response that His grace is sufficient. We're reminded that not all thorns are removed from our lives, and sometimes God's answer to our prayers is not deliverance from difficulty but strength to endure it. This funeral sermon honors Deaconess Barbara Fair, who lived with illness for 25 years, and celebrates the faithful caregiving of her husband, Deacon Kenneth Fair, over their 52-year marriage. The message centers on God's promise that His grace is sufficient in our weakness, drawing from Paul's experience with his "thorn in the flesh." The sermon emphasizes that God doesn't always remove our thorns but provides the strength to endure them. It presents caregiving as ministry in action and covenant love as a reflection of God's character. The central message is that while Barbara carried a physical thorn for 25 years, God's grace sustained both her and her husband, proving that divine strength is perfected in human weakness. The sermon ultimately testifies that sickness didn't write the final chapter of Barbara's life—God's grace, love, and eternal life did.

We learn four essential responses to life's persistent challenges: receiving God's will even when it differs from our desires, responding to God's wisdom that surpasses our understanding, relying on God's power rather

than our own strength, and rejoicing in God's promises even amid suffering. The concept of caregiving emerges as a profound spiritual ministry, showing us that love in its purest form is not just present during easy times but shines brightest when we walk faithfully through valleys with those we love. This message challenges us to see our thorns not as curses but as gifts that draw us closer to God, keep us humble, and reveal His sustaining grace in ways prosperity never could by demonstrating that when we are weak, God's power is made perfect.

Chapters

Chapter 1: The Thorn That Remained

We learn that some thorns in our flesh are not removed but remain, and God's grace becomes sufficient to carry us through our weakness and struggle.

Chapter 2: Angels on Earth: The Ministry of Caregiving

We see how caregivers are God's angels on earth, demonstrating Christ-like love through faithful service to those who are weak and vulnerable.

Chapter 3: Receiving God's Will and Wisdom

We must understand that God sometimes allows thorns to remain in our lives for divine purposes, and His wisdom surpasses our understanding of what we need.

Chapter 4: The Power Made Perfect in Weakness

We learn that God's power increases even as our physical strength decreases, and His grace sustains both the suffering and those who care for them.

Chapter 5: Rejoicing in God's Promises

We celebrate that love's promise was kept faithfully on earth, and now God has transferred that love to heaven where He personally cares for His child.

Key Points:

- God's grace is sufficient even when thorns remain and prayers for removal go unanswered
- Caregiving is God's way of putting angels on earth and reflects the character of God
- True covenant love is proven not on the wedding day but through faithfulness during trials
- Some thorns have divine purpose—they keep us humble and draw us closer to God
- God strengthens the shoulder to carry the load rather than always removing the burden
- Ministry happens at home, not just in church—faithfulness in caregiving is authentic worship
- When we are weak, God makes us strong through His power
- God's grace covered both the one suffering and the one caring for them
- Love keeps its promises all the way through, reflecting God's faithfulness
- Barbara's dignity, comfort, and joy were preserved through 25 years of devoted care

Scripture Reference:

- 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 (Primary text): Paul's thorn in the flesh and God's response that "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness"
- Matthew 25: Reference to "when you have done it to the least of these, my brothers and sisters, you have done it unto me"
- Romans 8:28: "All things work together for good for those who love God and who are called according to his word"
- John 14:1-3: "Let not your heart be troubled... In my Father's house are many mansions"

Stories:

- The 52-year marriage journey of Kenneth and Barbara Fair, with particular focus on the final 25 years of caregiving through Barbara's illness
- Deacon Fair's faithful acts of service: taking Barbara to therapy, getting her hair and nails done, cooking, cleaning, traveling, bringing her to church, taking her to Lott Carey conventions, and even putting her on the back of his motorcycle
- The hospital visit with Pastor, Reverend Taleeta, and Deacon Harry Smith days before Barbara's passing, where Kenneth knelt beside her, kissed her forehead, and announced the visitors even though she couldn't respond
- Barbara's last appearance at church wearing a white suit with a red scarf, sitting on the front row in her uniform with the other deaconesses

- The humorous incident of Deacon Fair parking in the pastor's spot at the hospital two weeks before Barbara's passing because there were no other spaces available
- God allowing Barbara to see another birthday last month, giving her 81 years—eleven years beyond the biblical three score and ten
- The ongoing testimony of Deacon Fair reading scriptures over his wife even when doctors gave up hope time and time again

Scripture References from the Sermon

Explicitly Cited Scripture References:

1. **2 Corinthians 12:7-10** - The primary text about Paul's thorn in the flesh
 - Verse 7: "To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me"
 - Verse 9: "But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness'"
 - Verse 10: "For when I am weak, then I am strong"
2. **Matthew 25:40** - Alluded to: "When you have done it to the least of these, my brothers and sisters, you have done it unto me"
3. **Matthew 25:21** - Referenced: "Well done, thy good and faithful servant... You have been faithful over the little, and I'm going to bless you with much"
4. **Romans 8:28** - Quoted: "All things work together for good for those who love God and who are called according to his word"

5. **John 14:1-3** - Quoted: "Let not your heart be troubled. You believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions... I'm going to prepare a place for you"

Hymns/Songs Referenced:

6. **"Great Is Thy Faithfulness"** - Based on Lamentations 3:22-23
7. **"Amazing Grace"** - The closing song lyrics referenced

Suggested Related Scriptures for Themes Discussed:

On Caregiving and Love:

- **1 Corinthians 13:4-8** - Love is patient, love is kind
- **Galatians 6:2** - Bear one another's burdens
- **Philippians 2:3-4** - Look not to your own interests but to the interests of others

On Marriage Covenant:

- **Ephesians 5:25** - Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church
- **Ruth 1:16-17** - Ruth's covenant commitment

On God's Strength in Weakness:

- **Isaiah 40:29-31** - He gives power to the weak
- **Philippians 4:13** - I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me

On God's Grace:

- **Ephesians 2:8-9** - For by grace you have been saved through faith
- **Hebrews 4:16** - Come boldly to the throne of grace

On Eternal Life:

- **Revelation 21:4** - He will wipe away every tear
- **2 Corinthians 5:8** - Absent from the body, present with the Lord

QUOTES:

Some thorns are not removed, but some thorns remain. And when they remain, God does not always change our situation. Sometime God strengthens the person who has to carry the thorn.

Caregivers are God's way of putting angels on earth. Caregiving is the love of God in his purest form. See, anybody can love when life is easy. Anybody can love when the bodies are strong. Anybody can love when the road is smooth, but it takes a special kind of love to love somebody through their weakness.

It's not enough for you to come to church and lift up your hands and give God the glory. What are you doing at the crib?

There are two ways of lightening a load on somebody's shoulder. One way is just to remove the load from the shoulder. The other way is to strengthen the shoulder to carry the load. For 25 years, God strengthened that shoulder to be able to carry that load.

God didn't just give grace to the one in the wheelchair. He gave grace to the man that was pushing the wheelchair. Grace is what carried both of them.

For 25 years, illness tried to write the last chapter of Sister Barbara's life, but today we testify that sickness did not get the last word. God's grace did. Love did and now eternal life does.

You loved Barbara faithfully all the way through her sickness. And now God has lovingly carried her from labor to reward. You kept your promise to her faithfully. And God has now kept His promise to you.

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5-Day Devotional: When Weakness Becomes Strength

Day 1: The Gift of Grace in Suffering

Reading: 2 Corinthians 12:7-10

Devotional: Paul's thorn in the flesh reminds us that some burdens are not removed but become instruments of God's grace. Like Sister Barbara's 25-year journey, our struggles can reveal God's sufficient grace. The thorn wasn't a punishment but a gift—keeping Paul humble and dependent on divine strength. When we face prolonged trials, we often pray for removal. Yet God sometimes answers differently, saying, "My grace is sufficient for you." This doesn't mean God is distant; rather, He draws closer, transforming our weakness into a testimony of His power. Today, consider what thorns you carry. Can you trust that God's grace is already at work, strengthening you in ways removal never could?

Day 2: Covenant Love That Endures

Reading: 1 Corinthians 13:4-8

Devotional: Deacon Fair's 52-year marriage, especially the final 25 years of caregiving, demonstrates covenant love in action. Love "bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things." This isn't the romantic love of movies, but the sacrificial love modeled by Christ. True love doesn't step away when vows become difficult; it steps deeper into them. Caregiving reflects God's own character—lifting the weak, carrying the burdened, dignifying the vulnerable. Whether you're caring for a loved one or supporting someone who is, remember: caregivers are God's way of putting angels on earth. Your faithfulness in the hard seasons is ministry. It's a sermon preached without words, revealing God's unfailing love to a watching world.

Day 3: Receiving God's Will Over Our Wishes

Reading: Romans 8:28-29

Devotional: Paul prayed three times for thorn removal—Jesus prayed three times in Gethsemane. Repetition in prayer isn't lack of faith; it's honest wrestling with God's will. Sometimes what we perceive as obstacles are actually divine appointments for spiritual growth. The thorn was "given" to Paul for his advantage, to prevent conceit and deepen dependence on God. We aren't smarter than God. He knows what we need to draw closer to Him, even when it looks like adversity. Sister Barbara's illness wasn't the end of her story but part of how God shaped both her and her husband's faith. Today, surrender your "why" questions. Trust that God's wisdom surpasses your understanding, and all things—even thorns—work together for good.

Day 4: The Power Made Perfect in Weakness

Reading: Philippians 4:11-13

Devotional: There's a divine paradox in Paul's declaration: "When I am weak, then I am strong." God's power increases precisely where our human strength diminishes. For 25 years, as Sister Barbara's body weakened, God's sustaining grace grew stronger in both her life and Deacon Fair's. This isn't logical—it's supernatural. God doesn't always untie our knots; He gives us grace to live with them. His strength isn't a one-time gift but a continual supply for every moment of need. When you feel overwhelmed, remember: God gives whatever you need whenever you need it. Your weakness isn't disqualifying; it's the very place where Christ's power rests upon you. Today, identify one area of weakness and invite God's perfect strength to work there.

Day 5: Rejoicing in Eternal Promises

Reading: John 14:1-6; Revelation 21:3-4

Devotional: The final chapter of Sister Barbara's earthly life wasn't written by sickness—it was written by God's grace, love, and eternal life. Jesus promised, "I go to prepare a place for you...that where I am, there you may be also." This hope transforms how we view suffering and death. Deacon Fair fought for his wife's dignity, comfort, and joy for 25 years, but now God Himself cares for her in glory. No more tears, pain, or wheelchairs—only wholeness. This promise sustains us through every trial: love here transfers to love there. We have too many victories, too many provisions, too many divine interventions to turn back now. Today, lift your eyes to Calvary. Remember that Amazing Grace caught your falling soul. He looked beyond your faults and saw your needs. Hallelujah!

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Small Group Guide: "She Doesn't Look Like What She Went Through"

Based on the Celebration of Life Service for Deaconess Barbara Fair

Opening Prayer

Begin your time together by thanking God for His sufficient grace, His faithfulness in our weaknesses, and for the testimony of lives lived in devotion to Him and to one another.

Scripture Foundation

2 Corinthians 12:7-10 (Read aloud together)

"To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. 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 about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me."

Key Themes from the Message

1. **Receiving God's Will** - Understanding that some thorns remain
 2. **Responding to God's Wisdom** - Trusting that God knows better than we do
 3. **Relying on God's Power** - Strength in weakness
 4. **Rejoicing in God's Promises** - Celebrating God's faithfulness
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Discussion Questions

Part 1: Understanding the "Thorn"

1. **What does it mean that some thorns are not removed but remain?** Have you experienced a situation where God didn't remove your difficulty but gave you strength to endure it?
2. **The pastor said, "God does not always change our situation. Sometimes God strengthens the person who has to carry the thorn."** How does this shift our perspective on prayer and unanswered prayers?
3. **Paul's thorn was described as being "given" for his good.** How can we begin to see our struggles as gifts that draw us closer to God rather than just burdens to be removed?

Part 2: The Ministry of Caregiving

4. **The message stated, "Caregivers are God's way of putting angels on earth."** Do you know someone who serves as a caregiver? How can we better support and honor them?
5. **Deacon Fair demonstrated that "it's not enough to come to church and lift up your hands and give God the glory. What are**

you doing at the crib?" How does this challenge us to live out our faith at home, not just at church?

- 6. For 25 years, Deacon Fair kept his wedding vows through extreme difficulty.** What does covenant love look like in practical, everyday terms? How is it different from ordinary love?

Part 3: God's Sufficient Grace

- 7. God told Paul, "My grace is sufficient for you."** What does "sufficient grace" mean to you personally? Can you share a time when God's grace was enough even when circumstances didn't change?
- 8. The pastor said, "God didn't want Fair to quit."** What are some reasons people want to quit in difficult seasons? What keeps us going when we want to give up?
- 9. "God doesn't always untie your knots, but our Heavenly Father does give the children the grace to live with the knots."** How does this truth bring comfort or challenge you?

Part 4: Strength in Weakness

- 10. Paul shifted from asking God to remove the thorn to celebrating having the thorn.** How do we get to that place of celebrating what we once wanted removed? What does that transformation look like?
- 11. The message emphasized that grace was given to both Barbara and Kenneth—to the one in the wheelchair and the one pushing it.** How does God's grace extend to everyone involved in a difficult situation, not just the one suffering most visibly?

Key Takeaways

Write these down and discuss which one resonates most with your group:

- Some thorns remain by divine design, and God's grace is sufficient for every thorn
 - Caregiving is ministry—it reflects the very character of God
 - Covenant love means stepping deeper into your vows when life gets harder, not stepping away
 - God's power is made perfect in our weakness, not in our strength
 - When we are weak, then we are strong—because we rely completely on God
 - Faithfulness at home is just as important as faithfulness at church
 - God is smarter than we are; He knows what we need even when we don't
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Practical Applications

Individual Reflection (5-10 minutes of silence)

- **What "thorn" are you currently carrying?** Have you been praying for removal, or have you asked God for strength to endure?
- **Where do you need to trust God's wisdom instead of your own understanding?**
- **Are you living your faith at home as fully as you do at church?**

Group Action Steps

This Week:

1. **Identify a caregiver** in your life (spouse, parent, friend, church member) and reach out to encourage them. Send a text, make a call, or write a note acknowledging their sacrifice.
2. **Memorize 2 Corinthians 12:9** - "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."
3. **Practice "covenant love"** - Choose one relationship where you need to step deeper into your commitment rather than stepping away. What is one practical action you can take this week?

This Month:

1. **Support a caregiver practically** - Offer to sit with their loved one, bring a meal, run errands, or give them a break.
2. **Study thorns in Scripture** - Look at other biblical examples of people who lived with thorns (Job, Joseph, David, Jeremiah). What can you learn from their responses?
3. **Share your testimony** - Tell someone about a time when God's grace was sufficient in your weakness. Encourage someone else who is struggling.

Reflection Questions for Journaling

- What would change in my life if I truly believed that God's grace is sufficient for every situation I face?
- Am I asking God to remove something He wants to use to strengthen me?

- How can I show covenant love to those closest to me this week?
 - Where do I need to stop trying to be strong in my own power and rely on God's strength instead?
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Closing Activity

Grace Testimonies: Take turns sharing one way you've experienced God's sufficient grace in a difficult season. If someone is currently in a difficult season, pray specifically for them as a group, asking God to make His power perfect in their weakness.

Closing Prayer Points

- Thank God for His sufficient grace in every season
 - Pray for caregivers in your church and community
 - Ask God to help you embrace your weaknesses so His power can be displayed
 - Pray for strength to keep covenant commitments when life gets hard
 - Thank God that He is faithful even when we are weak
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Additional Resources

Songs to Reflect On:

- "Great Is Thy Faithfulness"
- "Amazing Grace"
- "His Eye Is on the Sparrow"

Further Study:

- Read the entire chapter of 2 Corinthians 12
 - Study other "thorns" in Scripture: Job 1-2, Genesis 37-50, Psalm 22
 - Research what the Bible says about caring for the weak and vulnerable
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Leader's Note

This message was delivered at a celebration of life service, which makes it particularly powerful and personal. Be sensitive to group members who may be walking through grief, illness, or caregiving responsibilities. Create space for tears as well as testimonies. Remember that the goal is not to have all the answers but to point each other to the God whose grace is always sufficient.

ADDITIONAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How does Paul's experience with the thorn in his flesh challenge our modern expectations that God should remove all our difficulties and suffering?
2. In what ways can caregiving be understood as a form of ministry, and how does this perspective change how we view those who serve in this capacity?
3. What does it mean for God's power to be made perfect in weakness, and how have you experienced this paradox in your own life?
4. How does the concept of covenant love, as demonstrated by Deacon Fair's 25 years of caregiving, differ from contemporary cultural understandings of love?

5. Why might God choose to strengthen the person carrying the burden rather than removing the burden itself, and what spiritual growth can result from this approach?
6. How can we discern between prayers that God answers by removal versus prayers He answers by providing endurance and grace?
7. What role does faithfulness play in our spiritual walk, especially when circumstances do not change despite our prayers and efforts?
8. How does the statement that some thorns are given as gifts for our good challenge our understanding of suffering and divine purpose?
9. In what ways can adversity serve to keep us humble and dependent on God rather than becoming conceited in our own strength or accomplishments?
10. How should the church community support and honor caregivers who serve as quiet heroes, and what does this reveal about the nature of true ministry?

