



# Links Players

## SIX DEGREES FROM SUFFERING: PAUL

*Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, my power is made perfect in weakness." (2 Corinthians 12:8-9, NIV)*

FOR ALL THE GOLF I HAVE PLAYED IN MY LIFE, I have been almost entirely spared of interrupting injury. My back hangs in there and my knees and hips are free from pain. Once, though, when I was a teenager, I took a club back under a short tree and when I began my downswing, the clubhead snagged in the branches. Whiplash by definition is a severe jerk of the neck, but my wrist suffered its own sort of whiplash that day, and I was sidelined for a week or more—which is a lot when you're a junior golfer playing every day.

The cancer occurrences I have faced in the last four years have also spared me chronic pain. In fact, one of the things I have done to keep a handle on perspective through these years is to consider those whose troubles are greater than mine, and I am convinced that those who live with lingering or chronic pain are in that group. God bless them. Literally.

If you suffer this way, it may be of great comfort to you to know that Scripture recognizes your pain. The apostle Paul earned a degree in it. The records of his life include whippings and beatings, shipwrecks and a stoning, all of which he seemed to endure with willing acceptance as a servant of God. But it was the thorn in his flesh—a small but relentless pain—that sent him to the Lord in desperate prayer.

What we cannot know for sure is what Paul thought of God's answer at first. In brief, it must have sounded like this: "Sorry, Charlie." But Paul also knew the voice of the Lord well by now—the same voice that had awakened his soul on the road to Damascus. So, as hard as the words may have been in their meaning, the apostle knew they were coming from the one great caretaker. They were spoken in love.

Like Paul, maybe you have asked God many times for relief from the trial you are enduring. A way out. An end to the pain. But like Paul, you have received no such relief. Somehow you must find your way to the assurance Paul was given and to the assurance he gave to us by passing along God's words.

Weakness is never fun. It puts us in our place, shutting down our pride, and our confidence with it. But if it pushes us to draw daily on the strength of God, we have learned with Paul what it means to be rewarded in dependence.

**Opening questions** Has an injury ever kept you away from golf? What kind of injury, and for how long? Was it hard to figure out what to do with yourself in the meantime?

**READING** John 4:31-34; 2 Corinthians 11:22-29; 2 Corinthians 12:7-10

### Jesus' diet (John 4)

What did Jesus call his food in this passage? We are reminded here that spiritual provision can be more necessary than physical provision—how are you convinced of this in your own life?

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### Paul's many woes (2 Corinthians 11)

Which of Paul's experiences strikes you as especially hard? What do you think of the way he connects suffering and temptation in verse 29? Where do you find yourself to be weak?

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### Sufficient grace (2 Corinthians 12)

What makes God's grace sufficient for our greatest hurts? What kind of person is able to say with Paul that he or she "delights" in weakness and hardship?

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Written by Jeff Hopper ©2020 Links Players International. An introductory video for this study is available here: <https://youtu.be/ubphz03V0sM>