



A "THORNY" ISSUE

PART TWO INTRODUCTION

"PAIN", we are not fond of pain. We rebel at the thought of it and recoil at the sight of it. Many of us would like to live in a pain-free world. When we encounter a painful situation in our life and God does not remove it despite our praying, it may cause us to question our faith. But pain is a normal part of life. God allows the thorns in our lives to produce character. Rather than asking God to remove these pains from our life, let us learn from Apostle Paul on how he endured the pain and became stronger in the Lord.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Do you have a high or low pain tolerance? What will help to manage the pain?
2. Paul's thorn came by way of a messenger of Satan in order to torment him. Yet at the same time it was given to him in order that he would not become conceited. The present paradox can be compared to that of the story of Job. Satan was permitted to afflict God's servant, yet only within the parameters set by God (refer to Job 2).

What do you understand about the sovereignty of God in the case of Paul and Job? (See Col 2:15, Rom 8:28)

(Select either Question 3 or 4)

3. The ambiguity of the thorn in the flesh is actually a positive thing. If Paul would have specifically stated the identity of his thorn, believers from following generations may have discarded his experience if they were not afflicted with the same affliction. The thorn of which Paul speaks gives us an understanding of God's perspective concerning physical infirmities. Sometimes God uses illnesses for his purposes. Paul experienced many sufferings outside of his thorn (2 Cor 11:22-28), yet God used him mightily for the furtherance and advancement of His Gospel. The existence of illness or suffering in a believer's life does not necessarily constitute a sinful life or a life that lacks faith. Paul pleaded with the Lord on three separate occasions for the Lord to remove the thorn, yet God's grace was enough for the apostle and His power is made perfect in Paul's weaknesses.

What are the **lessons** God wanted Paul, and us, to learn from his thorn (or ours) in the flesh, regardless of what it was?

4. Read 2 Corinthians 12:6-10. Do an inductive bible study (observations, interpretation and application)? You can use the following as a guide.
 - i. Posture your heart. Spend some time in prayer and ask the Holy Spirit to be your teacher. Open your heart to the Lord to speak to you.
 - ii. Read the passage aloud
 - iii. Ask some context questions of the passage:

- What sort of writing is this? (a letter, a poem, a narrative etc?)
- Are there any clues about the circumstances under which it was written?
- What has happened so far in this particular book of the Bible?

iv. Some observation questions of the passage:

- Are there any major sub-sections or breaks in the passage?
- What is the main point or points?
- What surprises are there?
- What are the keywords? What words or ideas are repeated?

v. Some leading questions of the text:

- How does this passage relate to other parts of the book?
- How does the passage relate to Jesus?
- What does this teach us about God?
- How could we sum up the meaning of this passage in our own words?

vi. Some application questions of the passage:

- How does this passage challenge (or confirm) your understanding?
- Is there some attitude I need to change?
- How does this passage call on me to change the way I live?

5. God's grace is not only seen through our blessings but also in our pain. The Lord comes to us in our pain and He is not far removed. He sometimes answers our prayers by saying, "No."

Paul said, "*Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it [this thorn] might depart from me.*" But God's answer was, "*My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness*" (2 Corinthians 12:8-9). Interestingly, Jesus Himself prayed three times for "this cup," referring to His crucifixion and subsequent death, to pass from Him (Matthew 26:39-44). However, He graciously submitted to the will of His Father.

What should our response be when God allowed the pain to remain?

WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

His grace is unfailing strength in our pain. Put your confidence in God's grace by:

- Renewing your understanding in His Word
- Taking stock of grace in your life
- Responding in faith

God showed grace toward us through Jesus' pain on the cross. The grandest purpose of redemption was through the means of pain. He gives us the strength to endure the pain because His power fills the gap left by pain. God may allow the pain/circumstances to remain, but our attitude toward God's unfailing strength will change everything.

CHANGE YOUR MINDSET

"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." ~ **2 Cor 12:9-10**

***Recommended Resource:** <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/why-you-have-that-thorn>