

The Prayer Lesson

The prayer Paul prayed wasn't answered, at least not in the way he expected, because he asked a second and third time. Each time he asked God's answer was the same, **"My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness"** (2 Cor. 12:9). It was as if God was saying very clearly, **"LEARN ABOUT MY GRACE."** Perhaps this is the learning experience that taught Paul about a believer's deficiency in prayer which he later passed on to the Roman church: **"Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us...now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God"** (Romans 8:26-27).

Paul wrote his letter to the Romans in AD 57 from the church at Corinth where he had his struggle with the thorn in his flesh. He learned an invaluable truth about the grace of God flooding the weakened believer with glorious divine strength. His prayer was answered, but in a way that gave him a much greater blessing and enabled him to pass along his new insights to everyone reading his story in God's Word. God does not waste anything in the life of a believer, even our pain and the consequences of poor decisions. Each thing becomes a stepping stone to greater understanding, divine character building and a witness and blessing to others. Paul had discovered God's higher purpose in the midst of a very low point in his life.

Finding Pleasure in Distress

"Most gladly therefore, will I glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me" (2 Cor. 12:9b).

When Paul refers to the power of Christ "resting upon" him, he uses a word that means "tabernacled over" in the original Greek. This is a reference to the Old Testament place of worship for the Israelites; the abode of the 'shekinah' glory of God. It is as if Paul is saying that "Jesus pitched His tent over me."



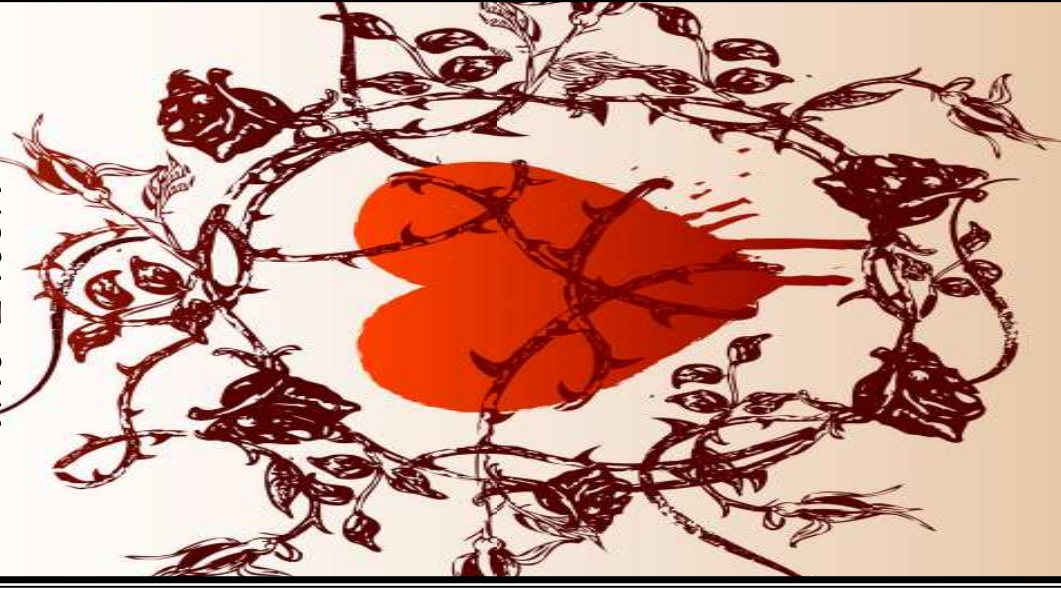
In Paul's weakest moments, Christ came and enveloped him with His presence. Paul experienced the power, glory, grace, and strength of His Savior. This speaks of being in unity with the Lord. The pain of Paul's thorn dimmed as he was lost in the embrace of Christ's grace.

The breakthrough lesson to be learned is that our weakness in dealing with any number of "thorny" circumstances can be a gateway experience to a deeper intimacy with our Lord. We do not relish the pain of the thorn, but we can anticipate the Lord's comfort, strength and grace in response to our request for His assistance. His glorious presence outweighs our greatest distress!

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"The Thorn in the Flesh"



By Pastor Curt Carter

"The Thorn in the Flesh"

"And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger from Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore most gladly will I rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong"

-2 Corinthians 12:7-10 New King James

The intriguing thing about these verses is how the Apostle Paul goes from "thorn in my flesh" to "take pleasure in my distress". How does any Christian get from the agony of a personal thorn in the

flesh to a place of restful peace and contentment no matter what is happening in and around them? In our lives we might face a troubling report from the doctor, having struggles in our marriage or with our children, suffering financial setbacks, dealing with a difficult boss, co-workers or any other number of distresses. How do we cope with these problems and develop a positive attitude in the process?



Great "Turn-Around" Scriptures

This isn't the only scripture that reveals this kind of "turn-around" from distress to finding contentment in God. In Psalms 13, David writes this lament to the Lord:

"How long, O Lord? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me? How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart daily? How long will my enemy be exalted over me? Consider and hear me, O Lord, my God; enlighten my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death; lest my enemy say, "I have prevailed against him"; lest those who trouble me rejoice when I am moved. BUT [my emphasis] I have trusted in Your mercy; my heart shall rejoice in Your salvation. I will sing to the Lord, because He has dealt bountifully with me."

So in six verses David goes from "sighing" to "singing"! **What gives?** What happened between verse four and five that turned David's attitude around. What happened between verses nine and ten in our opening scripture that completely changed Paul's outlook on his situation?

Thorns Really Hurt

We should never think that Paul got over his problem quickly because it really wasn't that bad in the first place. I think he deliberately chose the image of the thorn, reminiscent of our Lord's crown of thorns, to convey the piercing, stabbing, penetrating and painful experience he was having. He could not just overlook or get used to it.

Paul's Important Lessons

Paul believed that God was giving him a lesson concerning pride. God had given him special access to spiritual revelation to write about one third of the New Testament. He had also received understanding of divine

mysteries concerning salvation, the Body of Christ and prophecy. A reminder of the dangers of pride was appropriate for such a spiritual leader as the Apostle Paul.



In his book, "**Managing Your Emotions**", Dr. Erwin Lutzer wrote, "God's primary means of bringing emotional wholeness is by working through our spirit rather than adjusting our physical or environmental circumstances." I mention this because God has not only a **primary means** but also a **primary purpose** in all that He does. God's goal is that we would be transformed into the image and likeness of His Only Begotten Son, Jesus. He wants us to reveal the character, heart and obedience of Christ uniquely through our own individual personalities to give Him glory.

Whenever a "thorny" situation comes our way, we should be prepared to respond to God's **primary** concern. It may be to teach us about pride, trusting Him absolutely, learning to walk in unity with Him, obedience, or love. Just learning about Jesus' love will take many divine lessons possibly administered in the midst of what may appear to us to be an unrelated circumstance. But it isn't to God.