

Power in Weakness

II Corinthians 12:7-10

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Intro

In these verses we read that Paul had a thorn in his flesh. Many have speculated on what that thorn in the flesh may be. One thing is for certain, in was no small problem for Paul.

We read the word “thorn” and it brings to mind a little thorn from a rose bush, but the word in the original means, “tent stake.” It described an eighteen inch spike used to anchor down Bedouin tents in the desert wind.

Some believe that for Paul, the thorn in the flesh was perhaps a difficult person that followed Paul, or perhaps it was a problem of constant pain, or perhaps he was plagued with very poor eyesight.

We can all relate to some degree. Many people have experienced some persistent problem that refuses to go away and have asked the same question, “Why won’t this problem go away?” These verses are very helpful in understanding what God may be doing through the troubles that plague us, that will not go away.

These are insights into how God uses our weakness to bring His power into our lives.

I. Let God Do the Exalting

A. He who exalts himself will be humbled

- Paul says that he had experienced some wonderful revelations that were clearly beyond what most anybody else would experience.

Illus – Paul said that he knew someone (though most believe it was Paul himself being humble) who was caught up to the third heaven; the first being the atmosphere, the second the stars, and third, heaven itself.

- So Paul writes that God wants to keep Paul from exalting himself – on other words, to be caught up in pride.

Proverbs 16:18-19, “Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before stumbling. It is better to be humble in spirit with the lowly than to divide the spoil with the proud.”

- God knows that pride is one of the greatest problems in our lives and knows what we need to stay humble.

Illus – Moses had to spend 40 years in the desert before God made him effective in power.

Luke 14:11, “For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

B. God may allow a thorn in your life

- The thorn in Paul’s flesh drove him to prayer. Paul is such a good example for us in this because it shows that he just kept praying.

James 5:13, “Is anyone among you suffering? Then he must pray. Is anyone cheerful? He is to sing praises.”

- God may allow a thorn in our flesh because he knows that it is so easy for us to be distant from the Lord.

- We often pray for the thorn to be removed, but God knows that what we need most of all is Him.

Illus – Jacob had been a man insistent on doing things his own way, which so often was very different than God’s way, so God met him one night and they wrestled all night long... but in the end, the angel touched his hip and he had a limp the rest of the life.

II. Power is Perfected in Weakness

A. He who humbles himself will be exalted

- There is great strength in recognizing our weakness, in recognizing how much we need the Lord.

James 4:10, “Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.”

- God wants to empower your life, but we so often stand in the way. But when we come to the end of the rope, then we come to trust in His strength.

Illus – There is a hymn that I dearly love that we sing sometimes and there is a part of it that has ministered to me many times...

He giveth more grace as our burdens grow greater,
 He sendeth more strength as our labors increase;
 To added afflictions He addeth His mercy,
 To multiplied trials he multiplies peace.

When we have exhausted our store of endurance,
 When our strength has failed ere the day is half done,
 When we’ve come to the end of our hoarded resources
 Our Father’s full giving is only begun.

His love has no limits, His grace has no measure,
 His power has no boundary known unto men;
 For out of His infinite riches in Jesus
 He giveth, and giveth, and giveth again.

- This is a truth that is seen in scriptures from of old. One of my favorites and a theme of my life is found in Second Chronicles.

II Chronicles 16:9, “For the eyes of the Lord move to and fro throughout the earth to show Himself strong in behalf of those whose hearts are completely His.”

B. God’s grace is sufficient

- Three times Paul has specifically prayed that the thorn in his flesh be removed and God’s response was definite... “My grace is sufficient for you. Power is perfected in weakness.”

Illus – My family had decided to take my dad deep sea fishing for one last excursion as a family. Only I had never been on the ocean, and it was very hot that day... and I had to speak at a retreat that night...

- In other words, Paul’s prayer was not answered the way Paul desired, but nevertheless, Paul was content with the answer.
- Having the thorn in his flesh was of greater value than having his prayer answered.

Illus - Paul had been called to the Gentiles, but he kept insisting on going to the Jews... trouble and often riots would result. And in the end, he insisted on going to Jerusalem, although He was warned by the Holy Spirit of the dangers there. He was shortly arrested and never released, but God used it for His glory, for from prison he wrote many letters...

II Corinthians 4:7-9, “But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves; we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed;”

III. Learn to Be Content with Difficulties

A. When I am weak, then I am strong

- Paul shows in these verses the importance of accepting God’s answer with anticipation of what God is doing through the thorn that is allowed to remain.

Illus – It’s important to know that the thorn in Paul’s flesh was not sin, Paul didn’t have a sinful weakness that God thought it best to leave there.

We can’t say, “my weakness is chocolate, God hasn’t removed this thorn in my flesh so I will be content with it.”

- Paul is saying that he is content with God’s answer because God will use the trial, the difficulty in his life for something better.
- He knows that it brings him to a place of completely trusting in Him.

Psalm 127:1-2, “Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it; unless the Lord guards the city, the watchman keeps awake in vain. It is vain for you to rise up early, to retire late, to eat the bread of painful labors; for He gives to His beloved even in his sleep.”

B. There is a secret to being content

- Paul prayed specifically three different times that the Lord would remove the thorn in his flesh, but God’s answer was “no” because there was something better that God was working in Paul’s life through the weakness.
- We should not be afraid to pray repeatedly about something that is bothering us,
- But we should also be willing to accept it, to be content in it, knowing that God may use it in our lives for a greater glory.

Philippians 4:11-13, “Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.”

Conclusion

There is great faith in praying for the concerns and troubles of our lives and there is great faith in accepting God’s answer, whether it be yes, or no, because God’s grace is sufficient for us, and God’s power is perfected in our weakness.