Thorns in Our Flesh
2 Corinthians 12:7-10

**Objective:** To encourage @ to use their sufferings and tribulations to glorify God.

**Reading:** 2 Corinthians 12:7-10.

**Memory:** 2 Corinthians 12:10b; “…F_ w_ I  a_ w_,  t_ I  a_ s_.”

**Introduction:**
1. Have you ever gotten a thorn stuck in your thumb? It hurts. Sometimes you just can’t get it out and it has to stay in there a while. Constant irritation and hindrance. Gets in the way of whatever you’re doing. Seems to slow productivity. Might even need help getting your socks on.
2. We have such “thorns” in a spiritual sense as well. We call them hardships, problems, circumstances, tribulations, difficulties. They are part of our lives and for some of them, *God intends them to be.*

**We need to learn to appreciate the value of our struggles.** (HOW?)

By examining what God says regarding the holy apostle Paul’s “thorn in the flesh”, we can learn something of the value of our personal hardships and struggles. Listen to 2 Corinthians 12:7-10; “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. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”

One thing that stands out is that a “thorn” is not something trivial:

I. "Thorns" are very real and definite problems:
   A. Look again verse 10 for the descriptions of Paul's “thorn”.
      1. weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, difficulties. WE HAVE THESE!
      2. Paul prayed 3 times for God to remove his.
      3. In vs. 7: he calls it a “messenger from Satan” to “torment” him. It evidently was severe. It occupied his thoughts. It seemed to Paul to hinder his work for the Lord.
      4. Do you have such a thing? I'll bet you do. Probably a number of them.
   B. We are never told precisely what Paul's "thorn" is.
      1. Many guesses have been made. Poor eyesight / Malaria / Ugliness / Jewish persecutions / carnal temptations / Epilepsy / a speech impediment / Malta fever.
      2. We do know the nature of it, and we share things of that nature.
   C. What is your "thorn"?
      1. Health problems? A sharp and continual pain someplace? Someone else's health problems?
      2. Your spouse? A particularly difficult person with which you have to live or work?

Once we have thought about what our own thorn(s) is or might be, we should also notice that Paul's "thorn" was purposefully NOT removed even though God could have removed it. This is because:

II. "Thorns" can have a very definite purpose.
   A. A "thorn" does not represent a weakness of God; it may actually be *given* by God.
      1. Given for your development and growth or even your safety.
      2. Paul's was left to help him remain humble. "To keep me from becoming conceited..." (verse 7b)
      3. A difficulty like making a child remove training wheels from bicycle - so he/she can progress.
      4. Like making a child earn their own gas money for something.
      5. If everything comes too easy, there is no character development, perhaps no physical development, no development of skills, and in our case, no spiritual development.
      6. So, a "thorn" may actually reveal the love and care of God has for you. READ Hebrews 12:4-13.
   B. Your “thorn” may actually be given as a benefit to you personally.
1. What does the All Knowing One know you need in your personal spiritual development?
   a. Do you have a weakness for worldly possessions and therefore need to be kept poor?
   b. Do you have an irritability and therefore need to be in situations that teach patience?
   c. Do you have a tendency toward self reliance and therefore need some special hindrance to prove continually that you are personally inadequate? Do you need to be humbled?
   d. Maybe you have a spiritual deficiency when it comes to understanding the needs of others so God keeps you in the presence of those who are "thin-skinned" and easily offended, or who need kindness and understanding the most, so you can grow and develop in that area of Christianity?

2. Since "thorns" have a definite purpose, and for our own benefit, we should not be surprised when they are not removed - even with much prayer!

C. Perhaps your "thorn" is also a benefit to other people in your life.
   1. What do you teach others by your example in dealing with difficulties, discomforts, distresses?
   2. Do you live Godly in spite of hardships? Is Christ only your King during the good times?
   3. Do you demonstrate your commitment to God even through tribulations?
   4. Are you able to say with Job (Job 1:21), "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I shall return there. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away. Blessed be the name of the LORD." and again in Job 2:10, "Shall we accept good from God and not adversity?"
   5. Are you able to appreciate afflictions and to say with the Psalmist in Psalm 119:67, "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey your word. You are good, and what you do is good; teach me your decrees."

Thorns are not only given for our own personal spiritual growth and development, but also to glorify the power of God. We need to realize that:

III. God's power is perfected through our weaknesses: (vs. 9)

A. Our "thorns" actually serve to reveal the power of God.
   1. Some successes are obviously not by our own expertise and ability. They come from GOD! 2 Corinthians 4:7-10. “But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. 8We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; 9persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. 10We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.”
   2. Ever shake your head and wonder how you succeeded at something you know you can't do?
      a. There is no way I could have stood up to that peer pressure in the office.
      b. No way I could have shared the gospel to that particular person.
      c. No way we could have overcome such problems in our marriage.
      d. No way we could have picked up all those people and got them to church.

B. Your pain and inadequacy may be an opportunity for God's power to be recognized.
   1. This is a spiritual truth that we must learn.
      a. Where did I get the strength to withstand that kind of temptation? God is at work!
      b. How can you love someone after they treated you so nasty? God is at work!
      c. There is no way we could have survived the loss of that income. God is at work, I can trust Him!
      d. There is no way I could have made such a change in that person's life by my words. God at work!
      e. How could you have endured such a long, painful experience without becoming bitter and nasty?
      f. Romans 8:36-37, “As it is written: “For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.” No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.”

So what?:
  Christians are NOT given an easy life where all problems are removed by God! Learn to endure and give God glory through your struggle. (I couldn't have endured that on my own. It must have been God! I can do all things - through Him who strengthens me! There was absolutely no solution to my difficult problem, but God made one!) Learn to exult in your tribulation, whatever it is.
(Romans 5:3-5: “Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.”

Realize that if God does not remove a particular hardship or dilemma, He probably is planning to use it in some powerful and beneficial way that you do not yet realize. Learn to focus on Christ and serve Him even for the “thorn” in your side.

**Invitation:**
Have you become bitter toward God because of a thorn? Discouraged? Do you need extra strength with which to bear up and exult God in your tribulation? Prayers are powerful and God can and will give the strength to endure if you are willing. Do you need the prayers of the congregation in this? You need only to ask as we stand and sing a final closing song.
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I. "Thorns" are very real and definite problems:
A. Look again at verse 10 for the sorts of things Paul relates to "thorn".
B. We are never told precisely what Paul's "thorn" is.
C. What is your "thorn"?

II. "Thorns" have a very definite purpose.
A. A "thorn" does not represent a weakness of God; it may actually be given by God. Hebrews 12:4-13
B. Your “thorn” may actually be given as a benefit to you personally.
C. Perhaps your "thorn" is also a benefit to other people in your life. Job 1:21  Job 2:10  Psalm 119:67

III. God’s power is perfected through our weaknesses: (vs. 9)
A. Our "thorns" actually serve to reveal the power of God. 2 Corinthians 4:7-10
B. Your pain and inadequacy may be an opportunity for God’s power to be recognized.
C. READ Romans 8:36-37.

So what? Realize that if God does not remove a particular hardship or dilemma, He probably is planning to use it in some powerful and beneficial way that you do not yet realize. Learn to focus on Christ and serve Him even for the "thorn" in your side.

Action Plan: (Specify an action or change you will make in your life as a result of this message.)

Date: (When you will check to verify that you have done it.)