

2 CORINTHIANS 12:7 - 10 (NASB)

⁷BECAUSE OF THE SURPASSING GREATNESS OF THE REVELATIONS, FOR THIS REASON, TO KEEP ME FROM EXALTING MYSELF, THERE WAS GIVEN ME A THORN IN THE FLESH, A MESSENGER OF SATAN TO TORMENT ME—TO KEEP ME FROM EXALTING MYSELF!

⁸CONCERNING THIS I IMploRED THE LORD THREE TIMES THAT IT MIGHT LEAVE ME.

⁹AND HE HAS SAID TO ME, “MY GRACE IS SUFFICIENT FOR YOU, FOR POWER IS PERFECTED IN WEAKNESS.” MOST GLADLY, THEREFORE, I WILL RATHER BOAST ABOUT MY WEAKNESSES, SO THAT THE POWER OF CHRIST MAY DWELL IN ME.

¹⁰THEREFORE I AM WELL CONTENT WITH WEAKNESSES, WITH INSULTS, WITH DISTRESSES, WITH PERSECUTIONS, WITH DIFFICULTIES, FOR CHRIST’S SAKE; FOR WHEN I AM WEAK, THEN I AM STRONG.

The mystery of human suffering will not be solved completely in this life.

- Sometimes we suffer simply because we are human. Our bodies change as we grow older, and we are susceptible to the normal problems of life. The same body that can bring us pleasures can also bring us pains. The same family members and friends that delight us can also break our hearts.
- Sometimes we suffer because we are foolish and disobedient to the Lord. Our own rebellion may afflict us, or the Lord may see fit to chasten us in His love (Heb. 12:3). King David suffered greatly because of his sin; the consequences were painful and so was the discipline of God (see 2 Sam. 12:1-22; Ps. 51). In His grace, God forgives our sins; but in His sovereignty, He must permit us to reap what we sow.
- Sometimes suffering is a tool God uses for building godly character (Rom. 5:1-5). Certainly Paul was a man of rich Christian character because he permitted God to mold and make him in the painful experiences of his life.

*Text analysis:***v. 7 “...there was given me a thorn in the flesh “ (NASB)**

We do not know what Paul’s thorn in the flesh was. The word translated *thorn* means “a sharp stake used for torturing or impaling someone.” It was a physical affliction of some kind that brought pain and distress to Paul. Some Bible students think that Paul had an eye affliction (see Gal. 6:11); but we cannot know for sure. It is a good thing that we do not know, because we would try to “spiritualize it”.

v. 7 “a messenger of Satan...”

God permitted Satan to afflict Paul, just as He permitted Satan to afflict Job (see Job 1-2). While we do not fully understand the origin of evil in this universe, or all the purposes God had in mind when He permitted evil to come, we do know that God controls evil and can use it even for His own glory. Satan cannot work against a believer without the permission of God. Everything that the enemy did to Job and Paul was permitted by the will of God.

v. 7 “to torment (buffet) me—to keep me from exalting myself”

Satan was permitted to *buffet* (torment) Paul. The word means “to beat, to strike with the fist.” The tense of the verb indicates that this pain was either constant or recurring. This was a serious matter.

v. 8 “I implored (prayed to) the Lord three times that it might leave me”

No wonder he prayed three times, as his Lord had done in the Garden (Mark 14:32-41) that the affliction might be removed from him.

It is certainly a normal thing for a Christian to ask God for deliverance from sickness and pain. However, please know always the following:

1. God has not *obligated* Himself to heal every believer whenever he prays; but He has encouraged us to bring our burdens and needs to Him. Paul did not know whether this “thorn in the flesh” was a temporary testing from God, or a permanent experience he would have to learn to live with.
2. There are those who want us to believe that an afflicted Christian is a disgrace to God. “If you are obeying the Lord and claiming all that you have in Christ,” they say, “then you will never be sick.” I have never found that teaching in the Bible. The Lord never promised believers freedom from sickness or suffering.
3. Paul did not receive “instant healing” and maybe not any physical healing at all. He was not alone. The same was true for others, such as Epaphroditus (Phil. 2:25) and Elisha (2 Kings 13:14)

Monday Morning Moment

“God’s delays are not God’s denials.”

ISAIAH 40:29 - 31 (KJV)

²⁹HE GIVETH POWER TO THE FAINT; AND TO *THEM THAT HAVE* NO MIGHT HE INCREASETH STRENGTH.

³⁰EVEN THE YOUTHS SHALL FAINT AND BE WEARY, AND THE YOUNG MEN SHALL UTTERLY FALL:

³¹BUT THEY THAT WAIT UPON THE LORD SHALL RENEW *THEIR* STRENGTH; THEY SHALL MOUNT UP WITH WINGS AS EAGLES; THEY SHALL RUN, AND NOT BE WEARY; *AND* THEY SHALL WALK, AND NOT FAINT.