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## ***Thorn in the Flesh***

### **2 Corinthians 12:1-10**

We are prone to hide weakness & show strengths. It's only natural. We like to put the best foot forward—have people think more highly of us than maybe we deserve. Let them see us as more spiritual than we really are—tell of our successes & hide failures.

We like the admiration of others--look for peoples' approval. We hate it when trip over our words or humiliate ourselves. Worst is to be laughed at not with. We had a dog **Honey--cigar butt**

On the other hand a contrived image is a phony image & exhausting to maintain (**unnatural, artificial-actors**)—eventually it will collapse & realize ***I am what I am by the grace of God.***

God works opposite the way we think or expect.

**Is 55:9 For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways and My thoughts higher than your thoughts.**

**Rom 11:33-34 Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For Who has known the mind of the Lord or who became His counselor?**

We view weakness as a liability but God sees it as something He can use—**an asset**. Paul complained to the Lord about what he saw as a big flaw in his ability to be effective for God. He called it a ***thorn in the flesh***.

Not a little splinter but a twisting stake to impale/crucify, tent peg. **Naylene**

Paul started ch 11 w/ necessary boasting & continues but finally tells of his weakness...the thing used to show Gods power working thru him.

Gayle Irwin The Jesus Style 'Human nature says bigger is better, be in control at all costs, operate from a position of strength, don't show weakness, exert yourself, show of power. But God says His power is perfected in human weakness. We see this truth illustrated in the life of Paul the Apostle.

**Thorn in the Flesh****2 Corinthians 12:1-10**

**1 Boasting is necessary, though it is not profitable; but I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord.**

Necessary but doesn't bring benefit to God & His glory. But if I can get your attention so you listen to me. *Not profitable*-because it draws attention to me not Jesus-- *'I must decrease, He must increase.* *Visions*-awake yet dream state as events parade before the mind.

**2 I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago whether in the body I do not know, or out of the body I do not know, God knows such a man was caught up to the **third heaven**.**

Paul's out of body experience. *Know*-perceive w/ outward senses *Third heaven* 1<sup>st</sup>-birds fly, clouds float. 2<sup>nd</sup>-moon, stars, planets exist. 3<sup>rd</sup>-abode of God also called Paradise **Lk 23:43**

**3 And I know how such a man whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, God knows 4 was caught up into Paradise, and heard inexpressible words, which a man is not permitted to speak.**

So real unable to discern dimension entered—Lystra-dead/alive **Acts 14:19,20**  
*Heard inexpressible words*—so pure, so holy, so divine, unspoiled by human corruption--not fit to speak on earth. *'I walked in heaven w/ God 7 days'* Paul in realm unpolluted, unmolested by sinfulness of man--we must wait to get to heaven for that experience.

**5 On behalf of such a man will I boast; but on my own behalf I will not boast, except in regard to my weaknesses.**

Paul boasts in unnamed man so they can't boast in—tho he's referring to himself—His mindset is I don't want you to glory in me, but only in my weaknesses. Our weakness in God's hand turns to our credit & God's glory.

**6 For if I do wish to boast I shall not be foolish, for I shall be speaking the truth; but I refrain from this, so that no one may credit me with more than he sees in me or hears from me.**

## ***Thorn in the Flesh*** **2 Corinthians 12:1-10**

If I boast I'll not foolishly exaggerate but only tell what is true. Only be credited for what see & hear—not embellish or inflate what's true.

*7 And because 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 buffet me to keep me from exalting myself!*

*Those God uses greatly He wounds deeply.* With great revelation came a great thorn in the flesh to keep humble, not exalting self. *Messenger of Satan to buffet* Grk *mistreatment, painful attacks, sever beating by messenger of Satan*—*Thorn*: physical, emotional, mental.

*8 Concerning this I entreated the Lord three times that it might depart from me. 9 And 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, that the power of Christ may dwell in me.*

*Entreated*-called Lord to my side that it leave me—. **Not a lack of faith** but a lack of perception, lack of insight into what the *thorn* was meant for. We could make a list of things we want God to change in us or circumstances around us that we think are hang ups or hindrances to God in our life.

We've prayed over & over like Paul yet it remains? God's response to Paul and us *My grace is sufficient*—My favor, goodness, beauty & grace is enough-you have all you need to be & do all I've called you to be & do. All that God is, is perfected in all that I am not, weakness, flaws, hang ups. God's ability has full expression in my weakness. So get over it & accept it—His power is perfected in my weakness. *'when I am weak I am strong'*

*I walked a mile with Pleasure; She chatted all the way; But left me none the wiser  
For all she had to say. I walked a mile with Sorrow, And ne'er a word said she;  
But, oh! The things I learned from her, When sorrow walked with me. Rbt Browning*

Paul had this chronic condition for at least 14 years. It came after his heavenly vision. He finally quit praying to be delivered when divine understanding came **vs 9 'He has said (been saying) to me'**.

## ***Thorn in the Flesh*** **2 Corinthians 12:1-10**

All the time that Paul was praying God was speaking. The problem was Paul wasn't hearing what he wanted to hear.

*10 Therefore 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.*

It's hard to hear God when we are busy telling Him what we think He should do. Instead of God shaping, conforming us to His will & image we try to shape Him to our will as if we are the potter & He is the clay.

The best kind of clay is weak clay, soft, limp & malleable—only then can the potter form the vessel to His liking—one of beauty, value & worth. But if clay is stiff, hard & inflexible the potter adds water, kneads it, smashes it, pounds it to break down the stiffness & make it weak so potter can mold it.

*Jer 18:1-6 The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD saying, 2 "Arise & go down to the potter's house, & there I shall announce My words to you." 3 Then I went down to the potter's house, & there he was, making something on the wheel. 4 But the vessel that he was making of clay was spoiled in the hand of the potter; so he remade it into another vessel, as it pleased the potter to make. 5 Then the word of the LORD came to me saying, 6 "Can I not, O house of Israel, deal with you as this potter does " declares the LORD. "Behold, like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in My hand.*

:9 *Power perfected in weakness* – **dunamis** – dynamite (construct or destruct) – **perfected** - brought to completion, finished – Same word Jesus used from the cross *'it is finished'* – mission accomplished. **Weakness** – **lit** w/o strength – no resources to change the situation. Secret of spiritual power is stay in a place of weakness. ***For when I am weak then am I strong***

God will not work thru proud vessels ***'God resists the proud'***. But He will work thru humble vessels ***'But He gives grace to the humble.'***

Uzziah became king at 16 & reigned 52 years. He was admired by all, did right in the sight of God, defeated Judah's enemies, built cities, cultivated the lands, raised the standard of living & yet in the midst of all his success

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**2 Chr 26:16** *But when he was strong his heart was lifted up, to his destruction, for he transgressed against the Lord his God by entering the temple of the Lord to burn incense on the altar of incense.*

Success, popularity, blessings made him to feel strong, proud & invincible—which is a time of danger—enemy takes advantage to deceive & defeat

GB Duncan in 'The Discipline of Disappointment' – God works thru the man who has been wiped clean & turned inside out, his life emptied before the Lord until he is hopelessly weak, that no flesh might glory in His presence.

**Jesus our best example**

**Phil 2:5-8** *5 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, 6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*

1-Didn't regard reputation-not looking to impress w/ who He was or what He'd done

2-Emptied Himself, made Himself vulnerable & dependant on God the Father

3-Slave by choice, no rights except what master gives him...position of weakness, being exposed...low on totem pole..He came to serve, doing what would benefit others.

4-Humbled in obedience '**greater love has no man than this than that he lay down his life....'** **Not my will but Thy will be done'**...Love is always a choice..how far will we go.

**Those that God uses greatly He wounds deeply**

A beautiful old saint who walked w/ God all her life and had her share of suffering prayed 'Lord when will you stop laying in my path thorns & hardships? The Lord answered 'My child that is how I prove my friends.' The old saint replied, 'Lord, perhaps that is why you have so few of them.'—**Many w/drew—will you also leave-Peter where to you have words of et life Jn 6:68**