

## WHY ME? HELP AND HOPE FOR THE HURTING: SECTION TWO

### Three Promises That Encourage the Hurting – Promise Three/Power Through Weakness

Paul switches to the *perfect tense* in v9 in conjunction with the verb “said,” in reference to Christ’s reply. The significance? Jesus’ answer had a ripple effect upon the apostle. Just as a stone thrown in a pond enters the water with a splash, which in turn causes a series of ripples, so Christ’s response had an impact upon Paul that was not only dramatic and powerful, but lasting. It’s as if the answer continued ringing in his ears even years after it was first received. As this affliction continued to be a source of pain and discomfort, Paul would be in need of frequent encouragement. That took place through the constant reminder of Christ’s reply, as an expression of God’s best and perfect will for Paul.

With the exception of his conversion on the Damascus Road, I am of the opinion that this answer of our Savior, coupled with Paul’s response, proved to be the most important spiritual turning point in the apostle’s life and ministry. Why? For the struggle to have continued without a positive resolution, would have proved to be a huge hindrance in his service for the cause of Christ. But with the issue of the thorn having been settled, Paul was launched into a higher level of effectiveness as a minister of the gospel. The spiritual advantage that Paul derived from his adversity can be the experience of every Christian who goes through times of trial. This benefit can be stated by means of two principles, based on the answer he received from his Savior and Lord: *“My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.”*

#### **Principle #1: When prayer isn’t answered in the affirmative, grace is supplied for the negative.**

Paul, like any of us, would have been initially disappointed with the denial of his request. At the same time, he was encouraged to know that God’s all-sufficient grace would be there as a constant resource to draw upon, in helping him to cope with the pain and discomfort of his thorn. That very same grace is available for each of us, to help in our daily dealings with our respective “thorns” of adversity. A contemporary proverb says, “When God closes a door, He opens a window.” The door we are knocking on is what we think is best. The window God opens is what God knows to be best.

#### **Principle #2: When we are at our weakest, Christ’s power is at its greatest.**

Coming to grips with this profound paradox of Christian life and service was a difficult lesson for Paul to learn. He needed clear and direct instruction from Christ Himself. Once he realized the spiritual importance of this truth, and how the thorn would “activate” it in his ministry, he gladly submitted to this painful and humbling aspect of God’s will for his life. Paul’s submission serves as proof of the sincerity of his motivation as a Christian. His only desire was to live for Christ and serve Him to the greatest extent possible. When he finally realized that his thorn would not hinder that desire, but be of the utmost help in fulfilling it, his struggle melted into submission.

Paul at that point began to see his suffering for what it really was: a double-edged sword. On one side, the thorn proved to be a very painful and uncomfortable ordeal. On the other, it gave God an opportunity to be at work on Paul’s behalf. God provided him with all the grace he would ever need in coping with his hurt. More importantly, God took Paul in his weakness, and by His power, made him supernaturally strong. As it was for Paul, so it can be for each of us.