

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

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

The resolution to Paul's struggle with his thorn in the flesh expressed itself in a most unusual manner. He prayed for its removal and looked forward to an answer in the affirmative. But the very opposite occurred. The response which Paul received to his prayer consisted of a resounding "no!" Some have concluded that Paul lacked the necessary faith in making the request. Is this true? If only he had more faith, would the answer have been any different? Of course not! What an outrageous insult to this marvelous man of God to even imply that this may have been the case. However, this has proven to be one of the most insidiously cruel tactics of the Pentecostal and Charismatic movement; in order to support their false and failed teachings.

Even though the apostle's prayer was not characterized by a deficiency of faith, it was marked by a lack of wisdom. At the time Paul made his request, he was unaware of the purpose for this affliction. Paul saw nothing positive coming from it and prayed for its removal. The reason why his prayer was answered in the negative was that an answer of "no" was best for Paul. A positive answer would have been the very worst for him, in that pride would have become a dominant aspect of his character, rendering him spiritually useless in the cause of Christ. Nevertheless, Christ's answer must have stunned him; not only in the actual denial of the request, but for the reason why it was so necessary.

After Paul recovered from the shock of it all, the impact of the answer was more positive and profound. The two tenses which Paul uses in 2 Corinthians 12:8-9 indicate the 180-degree turnabout in his thinking which took place. He thought life would be better without the thorn. His Savior's response convinced him that life would be better with it, resulting in the necessary breakthrough in his struggle. Paul uses the *aorist tense* in v8 in conjunction with the verb "implored." This means that he prayed and prayed for the removal of this ailment and then, at some point in time, he stopped. Paul stopped praying for the removal of his thorn! When? Obviously, after receiving the negative reply.

In ceasing to pray, Paul was not guilty of a failure to persevere in prayer. We don't continue to pray for something when the answer is "yes." We stop praying. This should be our response as well when the answer is a clear and definitive "no." Just ask Moses, after he refused to take "no" for an answer from God regarding his entrance into the Promised Land (Deuteronomy 3:23-26). Perseverance in prayer is necessary *until* prayer is answered, and then, *only* when the answer is "wait." (Luke 11:5-10; 18:1-8). Understanding the difference between "no" and "wait" is critical. Had Paul failed to have such discernment regarding Christ's answer, his surrender to God's will would have been delayed indefinitely. Paul's struggle would have continued, due to his own stubbornness, and God's power through Paul's weakness would not have been manifested. The same is true for us. Do we think that we know what is best and insist on having our own way? The trade-off isn't worth it. Failure to resolve our personal struggles with adversity, in harmony with the will of God for our lives, will also mean the loss of an opportunity to experience God's power at work through our weakness.