

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

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

2 Corinthians 12:7 is so rich in practical importance that we will examine it in terms of three principles. First, *the distinction defeats the deception*. Without maintaining a distinction between God and the devil and their respective participation in our trial, we can easily be deceived by the evil one as to God's purpose and design for a particular adversity. Satan's deception will be to portray God as the "bad guy" in what has taken place. If successful, the devil can cause the Christian to become disillusioned with God and deeply discouraged in his or her everyday walk with Him.

This same deception proved to be the key factor in Satan's temptation of Adam and Eve in disobeying God. He convinced Eve that the fruit was forbidden because God was a "bad guy," who would go so far as to not only forbid the fruit, but lie about the consequences of eating it. Yet the distinction which Paul maintains in regard to his thorn is strong and clear. God's purpose for the thorn was good. He designed it for Paul's spiritual development. Satan's purpose for the thorn was evil, imposing it for Paul's destruction and discouragement. By maintaining this distinction, the apostle was eventually able to see his thorn as a good gift from God, which in turn enabled him to respond to it, and the One who gave it, in a positive manner.

The purpose of Paul's thorn speaks of yet another point of application: *our pride short-circuits God's power*. Pride is the worst of all sins, since it consists of the exaltation of self over and above God. Human pride serves as an enormous hindrance to the fulfillment of God's purpose in the life of the believer. Therefore, no Christian who is filled with pride can be effectively used by God. If Paul became proud as a minister of the gospel, that sinful condition of mind and heart would have rendered him spiritually useless in advancing the cause of his Savior. The apostle did not realize it at first, but God, in giving him a thorn in the flesh, actually did Paul a favor. How? His thorn kept him humble which in turn kept Paul useful.

A final helpful precept derived from 2 Corinthians 12:7 is this: *suffering develops sensitivity*. When all is going well, we can end up riding on a very high horse without realizing it. Suffering humbles us by knocking us off that pedestal. As we land with a thud, we develop an awareness of our pride and sin. We begin to see our faults and weaknesses like never before. We become spiritually sensitized to ourselves and God in a manner that occurs only in the context of adversity. This was the effect Paul's thorn in the flesh had upon him. For Paul to openly admit that he would have become proud as a peacock, if it weren't for the restraint of his painful and demeaning thorn in the flesh, is the expression of a spiritually sensitive and humble man.

What was true for this apostle, is also true for us. If we hope to be as mature and effective as Paul, we must be humbled by adversity in a similar manner. If we think we can develop into all that God wants us to be, in regard to spiritual sensitivity and usefulness, without going through meaningful times of suffering, we are only kidding ourselves. Ironically, one of the most concise assertions about the importance of trials in our personal development comes from a Middle Eastern proverb concerning climate and geography: "All sunshine makes a desert."