



Unbroken Series: Week One
"The Resume of The Weak" 2 Corinthians 12:7-10

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I. Paul's "thorn in the flesh."

- A. There has been much speculation about what Paul means by a "thorn in the flesh."
 - 1. The word we translate "thorn" could just as accurately be translated "stake" or "spear."
 - 2. The word was used to describe a sharp instrument that caused pain, lodged deeply, and was difficult to remove.
 - 3. Some people have suggested it was a spiritual weakness—some kind of besetting sin, nagging temptation, or spiritual darkness.

- B. The use of the word "flesh" seems to suggest that it was some kind of physical ailment or disability.
 - 1. It could have been epilepsy, poor eyesight, migraines, a speech impediment, or a stomach disorder.
 - 2. What's your "thorn in the flesh?" ...;
 - 3. It could be something you've lived with for a long time or something that's happened to you more recently.
 - 4. In fact, when we own our weaknesses, God can turn them into strengths.
 - 5. Think about it: sometimes stories of strength in times of weakness are more compelling than stories of healing and deliverance.
 - 6. How can we handle our weaknesses in ways that allow God to display his power in us and through us?

II. Ask God to take the thorn away.

- A. The first way we can respond to a thorn in the flesh is to ask God to take it away.
 - 1. Paul is not suggesting that we simply give in to our weaknesses and vulnerabilities without a fight.
 - 2. That's what Paul did;

- B. In verse 8 he writes, "Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me."
 - 1. He fervently and repeatedly asked God to remove his thorn.

2. He didn't enjoy being sick; he didn't seek out suffering.
3. He asked God to take it away, so that he might serve Christ at full strength.
4. Certainly we pray in submission to God's will.
5. But if it be Thy will to let him suffer, or to take him home to Thee then we accept that as Thy will also."
6. When someone is sick or suffering, I pray passionately and boldly for his or her deliverance until God shows me otherwise.

III. Accept God's sovereign will.

- A. Sometimes God takes the thorn away, but sometimes, in his wisdom, he does not.
 1. It doesn't matter how hard we pray or how much faith we muster up.
 2. In verse 7, Paul indicates that God allowed the thorn for a purpose: "*to keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations...*"
- B. Yet at the same time that Satan delivered the thorn, God was superintending the process.
 1. God allowed Satan to inflict the thorn in order to accomplish a greater purpose.
 2. God allowed this thorn in order to protect Paul from pride and to bring greater glory to God's name.
- C. So it was for Paul. In verse 9, he uses the phrase "he said to me" to suggest that God had spoken the final word on the issue.
 1. That expression was used to describe the edict of a king—a declaration that was final and had continuing effect.
 2. Jesus prayed three times for the Father to take away a far more horrific thorn than the one Paul had to contend with.
 3. We should recognize that God has a greater purpose in mind. Then we will discover that God's grace is sufficient for the experience.

IV. Appropriate God's grace.

- A. Once we accept our situation as God's will, we must appropriate God's grace.
 1. Grace here refers to all of God's resources—his strength, joy, and peace.
 2. Notice "appropriate" is an active word—aggressive, even.
- B. There's nothing passive about Paul's response to the thorn in the flesh.
 1. According to verses 9 and 10, he not only endures his weakness, he boasts in it.
 2. He knows that God can accomplish things through his weakness that could not have been accomplished through his strengths.