



Series: Hard Truths | Big Help

INTRODUCTION

Most people understand the relief of removing something painful like a splinter or a stone in a shoe. If something is causing pain, the obvious instinct is to get it out. For us in life, the painful things might be physical or emotional: pain, pressure, weakness, conflict, or limitations.

But sometimes there are situations where a doctor will leave something in place temporarily because removing it wrongly could cause greater damage than leaving it under careful watch.

That is exactly where Paul found himself in our passage tonight. He had something painful enough to pray about it to God repeatedly. He no doubt asked sincerely three times. Yet God's answer was to allow it to remain. It was not because God did not care or was distant. It was because God had a purpose more important than immediate relief.

This week's hard truth is a tough one the older generation knows very well:

Sometimes what we most want removed is being used by God for a greater purpose.

1. Paul's Thorn – He prayed earnestly and seriously three times to God to remove it.

2 Corinth 12:7 – ... *there was given to me a thorn in the flesh... Satan to buffet me...*

2 Corinth 12:8 – *For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me.*

2 Corinth 12:9 – *And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness...*

2 Corinth 12:10 – *Therefore I take pleasure... for when I am weak, then am I strong.*

Definition:

Thorn – *a continuing pressure, limitation, irritation, or weakness allowed by God.*

Insights:

- ✓ Paul knew that this “thorn” kept him from **pride** related to God's miraculous **GIFTS**.
- ✓ Paul knew that it was part of spiritual **warfare** – specifically Satan's fiery **DARTS**.
- ✓ Paul did not ignore it – he prayed specifically and repeatedly for God to **remove** it.
- ✓ God told Paul that the thorn allowed God to provide **grace** to overcome weakness.
- ✓ Paul received the “No” answer **joyfully** as a blessing from God for a greater **PURPOSE!**

QUESTION: What is your “thorn” in the flesh? Could there be a greater purpose?

Key Truths

- ✓ Sometimes prayer does not mean God will remove the problem **IMMEDIATELY**.

Examples (*Family burdens, physical weakness, unresolved grief, difficulties, limitations*)

Moses – **Deuteronomy 3** – he prayed earnestly to go into *the Promised Land*.

David – **2 Samuel 12** – he prayed earnestly for Bathsheba’s *child to live*.

Jesus Christ – **Matthew 26** – He prayed earnestly for God to remove *the cup*.

- ✓ Sometimes God allows something difficult to remain because it is **HELPING** you.

Examples (*Keeps pride low, deepens prayer life, restrains self-sufficiency, protection*)

Jacob – **Genesis 32** – he leaned on his staff for the rest of his life after a blessing.

Joseph – **Genesis 40-41** – he was delayed in prison to prepare him for the future.

Elijah – **1 Kings 19** – the juniper tree season humbled him to teach him a lesson.

- ✓ Sometimes God allows something difficult for you to experience His sustaining **GRACE**.

Examples (*“Footprints in the sand”, burden stays, you get “stronger” by God’s grace*)

Job – **Job 1-42** – a season of long suffering remained before explanation came.

Timothy – **1 Timothy 5:23** – his bodily weakness remained to trust God daily.

Martha/Mary – **John 11** – the wait for Jesus Christ provided opportunity for grace.

- ✓ Sometimes what remains can become the place of your greatest spiritual **STRENGTH**.

Examples (*The thing desired to be removed brings dependence, prayer, humility, maturity*)

Paul – **2 Corinth 12:10** – God’s classroom – his weakness became his strength!

Moses – **Numbers** – 40 years in the wilderness prepared deeper strength in God.

Peter – **Mark 14:66-72** – failure became a later strength to bring God more glory.

2. THE OLDER GENERATION

Listen to their Testimonies:

- ✓ “The burden remained, but it stopped controlling me...”
- ✓ “God did not remove the pain but gave sufficient grace...”
- ✓ “I did not see it at the time, but God had a bigger plan...”

YOUR TESTIMONY:

3. PRACTICAL WISDOM FOR ALL GENERATIONS

- ✓ God provides life lessons for us in the “thorns” and seasons of life...

1. Some things never fully leave – but they stop controlling you and limiting **THINKING**.
2. Long burdens often teach what quick relief cannot. This is a **PARENTING** lesson also.
3. Grace often becomes more visible in **DAILY** burdens (mercies) than in sudden removal.
4. What remains may be proof God is working something more **IMPORTANT** than relief.

To all generations:

Which is harder: Trusting God when heaven is quiet, or trusting God when something remains?

To the older generations:

Be an example for the younger believers; share your personal testimony of this truth.