



THORNS DEVOTIONAL

2 CORINTHIANS 12:7

“So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited.”

EXPERIENCE

The feeling of cornering around a tight turn and accelerating into a straightaway on a mountain bike is exhilarating. Going over rises and dips on a trail or a little too fast down a hill makes your heart race. I love the sense of accomplishment when I summit the top of a tough hill having pedaled the whole way up. However, speeding through the woods is a thrill that is sometimes interrupted by a flat tire! Ugh!! This unwelcome disruption of an otherwise great experience can be very frustrating. You get off the bike, call out to your companions to hold up, you take out the tools, flip the bike, remove the wheel, release the air pressure, break the seal, tire lever the rim, and pull the tube. Then comes the fun part, you run your fingers around the inside of the tire,

and sure enough . . .ouch! A thorn has punctured the tire and pricked your finger. Thorns sure are a pain!

I've had a few flat tires in my time caused by thorns, but I've had many more cuts and scratches from hiking, hunting, or berry picking. Bloodied legs and arms are a common occurrence for me as I heedlessly trudged through brambles. The worst are those two-inch hawthorn spikes or devil's walking sticks. If you are not familiar with devil's walking sticks, they are a small tree that grows perfectly straight. From a distance they look like the perfect walking stick. When you are hiking through the woods and looking for a tree to steady yourself these trees look so tempting to grab, but they are filled with small thorns. Just the slightest grab is excruciating. It is amazing how the smallest little thorn can cause so much pain. While I hate thorns, I recognize that they can serve good purposes.

CONTEMPLATION

Thorns slow us down. They cause us to be cautious and to take our time. While interruptions to my mountain biking are often met with frustration, in reflection I can see the benefits of being forced to slow down. A breakneck pace is not necessarily always good for me, on mountain bike trails or in life. Being forced to stop is not always a bad thing. Slowing down on a trail hike is the same—carefully stepping through briars, and then kindly holding back the thorn filled branch so it does not whap the person behind me is a good exercise in thoughtfulness. Thorns appear to be specifically designed to inflict pain. Anytime we see thorns, they are a reminder of the reality of pain in this life. The thorns and the pains of this life have been some of my richest moments. Forced times of slowing down focused my attention

on the present circumstances and the people around me. The thorns of life can enrich conversation and sharpen one's attentiveness to others' needs. Thorns of life have pointed my mind and heart to God and what he is doing in and around me. I still don't like thorns, or pain for that matter, but life has taught me their value.

Application: What are the thorns in your life right now? Sometimes I've stopped at the sight of a thornbush or a hawthorn tree. I break off a thorn and hold it in my hand. Pausing intentionally to consider thorns is a great way to reflect and pray about the trials of this life. Take some time not only to reflect upon your own life, but also to think about those whose lives are filled with thorns at present. Pray for them, that God's grace might be on display, and that they have eyes to see it and hearts perceive the good that God is bringing to fruition. I don't believe it is a coincidence that some of the most luscious, sweetest raspberries are found near thorns.

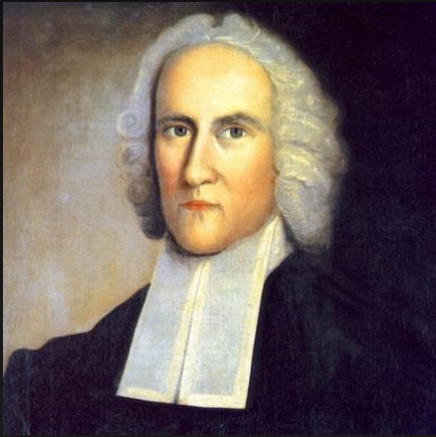
PRAYER

Heavenly Father, as I ponder the thorns in my life right now it is so easy to respond to them in frustration and bitterness. Help me to see the good in them. Help me to ask the right questions such as, "how is this thorn a grace to me?". Help me to slow down, to take stock of my circumstances and my heart. Grant me a spirit of sober-minded reflection that results in eyes that look to you rather than to my own strength. Give me eyes for others struggles that I might be mindful of the difficulties of others and have a heart to reach out to them. Just as some of the choicest berries are found amongst thorns, I ask that you might ripen my faith in and through and amidst the thorns of this life. I ask it in Christ's name and for his glory. Amen.

CONFIRMATION

The thorn in the flesh spoken of by Paul in 2 Corinthians 12:7 was God's means of keeping him humble. Paul says the thorn was to "keep me from becoming conceited". The link between thorns and humility is clear, not only from Paul's experience but also from Christ's crown of thorns. A crown symbolizes exaltation, yet the soldiers' crown of thorns on Christ was meant to humiliate him. Christ Jesus, the King of Kings, the exalted One, was willing to be humiliated on behalf of those he came to save. The thorns on Christ's head point us to his humility. In Philippians 2:8-9, Paul extols Christ's humility stating, "And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name." If you have not already, take some time to read and meditate upon the key Scripture passages connected to the emblem of thorns.

- Thorns are an emblem of God-ordained trials and difficulties designed to bring about humble faith, reliance upon Christ, and the exaltation of Christ in the lives of his people.



Jonathan Edwards

FROM NOTES ON SCRIPTURE [\[WJE 15:292\]](#)

“And so Paul, when he was received up to ‘the third heaven,’ received ‘a thorn in the flesh’; lest he should be exalted above measure, he had a ‘messenger of Satan’ to buffet him. So grievous [a] calamity it was that he labored under, that he besought the Lord thrice that it might be taken from him (2 Corinthians 12:2-8). Sometimes extraordinary light and comfort is given to fit for great calamities, and sometimes for death, which God brings soon after such things. So when God gives his own people great temporal prosperity, he is wont to bring with it some calamity to [eclipse] it, to keep them [from] being exalted in their prosperity and trusting in it.”¹

¹ [Jonathan Edwards, Notes on Scripture, WJE 15:292.](#)