



**Sermon Series:** Facing Our Fears, Intro to Series & Part 1

**Sermon Title:** Fear of Loss

**Speaker/ Date:** Armin Sommer, May 9, 2021

## 2 Corinthians 12:7-10

In 2 Corinthians 12, Paul, though possessing a “thorn in the flesh,” no longer feared it or the loss it represented. He’d come to terms with it by learning to view his thorn / his loss as an opportunity for God to work in His life.

**Big Idea:** View your thorn as an opportunity for God to work in *you*.

Paul employed 3 important perspectives

### Perspective #1: God’s Sovereignty

14 years earlier God gave Paul a real, honest-to-goodness view of the New Heaven/Earth that believers will populate at the inauguration of eternity. In its aftermath, Paul receives his thorn.

Verse 7 says it was granted in order to torment him, so he would not be conceited. The immediate source was Satan, but the sovereign source was God. The thorn in question was entrusted / granted to him. **2 Corinthians 12:7** It wasn’t a punishment. What was Paul’s thorn?

“Thorn” comes from the Greek word, *skolops*, meaning “an injurious foreign object.” It’s physical. God permitted Satan to torment Paul. Satan’s purpose was purely malicious. But God saw to it that the thorn would fulfill a good purpose in Paul.

We don’t know for certain what Paul’s “thorn” was, but its use implies recurring or chronic illness. Most say it was his eyesight. **Galatians 4:15, Galatians 6:11**

Paul knew a loss, afflicted by the evil one, but designed by God to benefit His servant. God gives no thorn without good purpose. **2 Corinthians 4:17**

### Perspective #2: UNANSWERED prayer

Paul’s cry to the Lord: “God, I don’t want this thorn.” **2 Corinthians 12:8**

Jesus' answer: "Paul, you need this thorn." Jesus' answer: "Fix your eyes on me. I'm with you. You have a thorn. I wore a crown made of them for you."

Our understanding of suffering is pitifully superficial. It's common to think - if it is unpleasant, it certainly could not be God's will. And if we simply bring it to God's attention, He will brush it off of us as casually as we would remove a piece of lint from a dark suit.

God will remove no thorn and will replace no loss until it has accomplished His purpose for granting it. Recall the words of Job in Job 23:10.

It is not wrong to request the removal of a thorn. Some thorns God quickly removes for his glory. Other times He deeply embeds the thorn with painful loss. Always with good purpose even if the Lord's answer is a persistent "no".

### Perspective #3: HUMAN WEAKNESS

Human weaknesses give opportunity for others to see God's surpassing glory without being dimmed and muddled by human ability 2 Corinthians 12:9-10. Human greatness sometimes masks the glory of God. Human weakness highlights the greatness of God. 1 Corinthians 1:27-29

God's power is at work within us, even when we feel empty and powerless. He tells us in Hebrews 11:34, that when we follow Him in simple trust, your "weakness will be turned to strength."

Ask the Lord to remove it; to grant you relief from it. If He does, then rejoice in His answer.

If he does not remove it, then suspect that God has in mind a greater work for your thorn. Ask Him for grace & wisdom to regard it as an instrument for accomplishment of a greater work.

Thank him for this thorn. Rest in His sovereign care for you.

Expect God to use your thorn as a vehicle for His glory. And do not be afraid.

**Big Idea:** View your thorn as an opportunity for God to work in *you*.

## Discussion Questions:

- What about the sermon stuck with you this week? What part challenged your thinking?
- How would you answer people who claim it is God's will to remove every thorn from the lives of His followers?
- Describe examples of a thorn that other people in the Bible had/ do have in their life, and how God used it for His purposes.
- What are some reasons that God would not answer our prayers with a "yes"?
- Explain a time in the past when God used a weakness in your life to highlight His greatness
- How did that thorn draw you closer to (or further away) from God?

## BIBLE VERSES

**2 Corinthians 12:1–10 (NIV)** I must go on boasting. Although there is nothing to be gained, I will go on to visions and revelations from the Lord. I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know—God knows. And I know that this man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows was caught up to paradise and heard inexpressible things, things that no one is permitted to tell. I will boast about a man like that, but I will not boast about myself, except about my weaknesses. Even if I should choose to boast, I would not be a fool, because I would be speaking the truth. But I refrain, so no one will think more of me than is warranted by what I do or say, or because of these surpassingly great revelations. Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

**2 Corinthians 12:7 (NIV)** I was given a thorn in my flesh

**Galatians 4:15 (NIV)** I can testify that, if you could have done so, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me.

**Galatians 6:11 (NIV)** See what large letters I use as I write to you with my own hand!

**2 Corinthians 4:17 (NIV)** For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.

**2 Corinthians 12:8 (NIV)** Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me.

**Job 23:10 (NIV)** But he knows the way that I take; when he has tested me, I will come forth as gold.

**1 Corinthians 1:27–29 (NIV)** But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him.