

GOING DEEPER STUDY NOTES (October 3, 2021)

FOR PERSONAL OR GROUP STUDY

In the early years of the Christian church, not many years after the miracle of Easter morning, a man named Saul encountered Jesus and his life flipped. The direction of his life spun completely around, the condition of his heart changed, his message and approach to others changed, his hope for the future changed. Even his name changed, Saul became Paul.

He was so convinced that Jesus was God's greatest solution to our greatest need that he talked about Jesus whenever and wherever God provided the opportunity. The Holy Spirit used those conversations to convict and convince. Many came to trust Jesus. Along with the celebrations, opposition came. There were those who fiercely attacked the new Christians and the messenger, Paul himself. At one point Paul recounted the difficulties he faced, "far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked ..." (2 Corinthians 11). I've condensed his list.

Paul's life wasn't easy, simple, smooth. In addition to the above there was something else in his life that caused him great difficulty. He wrote about it only once. When he did he called it "a thorn in the flesh." He prayed that God would heal this affliction, remove the thorn, but apparently God did not. Instead, God declared that Paul's weakness would actually accentuate God's power, "*My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.*"

The passage for today is a clear reminder that power and strength in our Christian life comes from God, not from our own reserves, or that of others. We do not need to hide our weaknesses ... we can acknowledge them, knowing that God loves us, broken and flawed as we are. By His grace He works through us, and our imperfections, to introduce every person we meet to the beauty and life-changing power of Jesus. Exciting ... and freeing!

God's Grace is ENOUGH (SERMON PASSAGE: 2 Corinthians 12:7-10)

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. ⁸ Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. ⁹ 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 of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. ¹⁰ For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong."

WHAT DOES IT SAY?

1. Why did Paul believe he was given his "thorn in the flesh"?
2. Why might Paul be in danger of becoming conceited? Read 2 Corinthians 11:16-28 and 12:1-6.
3. Paul was deeply devoted to Jesus. Through him God performed significant miracles (Read Acts 19:11-12). Did God answer Paul's pleading (prayers) and deliver him from his affliction?

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

4. What image does a "thorn in the flesh" bring to your mind?
5. What do you think Paul meant when he labeled this "thorn" a "messenger of Satan"?
6. What might cause a Christian to become "conceited"? Have you known Christians who feel they are a "better Christian" than others (they feel they are more spiritual, more blessed by God, more gifted, more effective)?
7. Does God answer all of our prayers as we expect and want?

WHAT IS GOD SAYING TO YOU?

8. What in your life helps you remain humble as a Christian?
9. What "thorns" do you have in your life? How can (have) those "thorns" be (been) used by God to accomplish His purposes?
10. Are there prayers you have prayed that have not been answered as you'd hoped? How might this passage help those who have been told that God hasn't answered their prayers because they do not have enough faith?
11. When you become aware of your weaknesses do you find they help or hinder your relationship with Jesus and others? Make a private list of your weaknesses and how God can use them.

Notes: _____

Spend time in silence, praying (even if just for a moment or two). Prayer is simply a conversation with God. Be honest. If you don't know how or what to pray admit that and ask God to help you pray. Ask God to help you remain humble. Ask God to show you those things in your life that you see as weaknesses but He intends to use for His good purposes. God loves you and He will help you.