

Rose, Bud, Thorn IceBreaker		
		
Rose What are you thankful for?	Bud What are you looking forward to? What are your hopes and dreams?	Thorn What is a challenge or stressor you are facing?



What is a thorn?

A thorn is a sharp, pointed structure that can be found on certain plants, such as roses, hawthorns, and some types of cacti. Thorns serve as a defense mechanism to protect the plant from herbivores and other potential threats. They are typically modified branches or stems, and their sharpness helps deter animals from eating or damaging the plant.

In addition to their botanical meaning, "thorn" can also refer to something that causes pain or difficulty, metaphorically speaking. For instance, a problem or annoyance can be described as a "thorn in one's side." In this context a **thorn** is something or someone that painfully nags or irritates one's humanity on a continuous basis.

Scripture Context: 2 Corinthians 12:7-9 (ESV)

“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. Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. But he said to me, *"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."*

What is the “thorn” Paul is referring to?

Many interpreters have speculated about what Paul’s thorn might be. But whether Paul is referring to a physical, spiritual, or emotional affliction—or something else entirely—has never been answered with satisfaction. Since he was not talking of a literal thorn, he must have been speaking metaphorically. Some of the more popular theories of the thorn’s interpretation include temptation, a chronic eye problem, malaria, migraines, epilepsy, and a speech disability.

Some even say that the thorn refers to a person, such as Alexander the coppersmith, who did Paul “a great deal of harm” (2 Timothy 4:14). No one can say for sure what Paul’s thorn in the flesh was, but it was a source of real pain in his life. Since we’re left to guess at exactly what the thorn was, that gives us the freedom to apply any of our “thorns” to this passage, but Paul tells us several things about his. First, it was clearly painful. It brought him **torment**. Second, though God was the ultimate source of the thorn, Satan served as the delivery system.

Are there any others in the bible who have a similar experience?

As in Job’s experience (Job 1:7-12), God allowed Satan to bring suffering into Paul’s life, but (unlike Satan) God had good purposes in mind. Third, God’s intention was that Paul not exalt himself as a result of his astonishing experiences. The Lord wanted to keep Paul humble because removing his self-sufficiency would eliminate any stubborn **pride**, make him more useful, cause him to bear more fruit in ministry, and bring more glory to God. If God gives you a “thorn” in the flesh” you can be certain that it’s for your good and because he loves you. It is intended to unveil anything in your life that is not in sync with God’s kingdom agenda. Your self-sufficient attitude stands in the way; he wants you to see him as your all-sufficient God. Thus, sometimes God acts like a recycling plant in our lives: he breaks us down so that he can reuse us and increase our anointing.

No one likes to live in pain. Paul sought the Lord three times to remove this source of pain from him (2 Corinthians 12:8). He probably had many good reasons why he should be pain-free: he could have a more effective ministry; he could reach more people with the gospel; he could glorify God even more! But the Lord was more concerned with building Paul’s character and preventing **pride**. Instead of removing the problem, whatever it was, God gave Paul more overwhelming grace and more compensating strength. Paul learned that God’s “power is made perfect in weakness” (verse 9).

The exact nature of Paul’s thorn in the flesh is uncertain. There is probably a good reason that we don’t know. God likely wanted Paul’s difficulty to be described in general enough terms to apply to any difficulty we may face now. Whether the “thorn” we struggle with today is physical, emotional, or spiritual, we can know that God has a purpose and that His grace is all-sufficient.

Questions to Ponder:

- ❖ Does everyone have a thorn? Do you?
- ❖ In what way can a thorn be a gift?
- ❖ How can we tell the difference between a “thorn” and the everyday trials of life?
- ❖ What should our response be once we have identified the “thorn in our flesh”?
- ❖ What can we learn from Apostle Paul’s experience?