

Every Thorn has its Rose: The Purpose Behind the Pain

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2 Corinthians 12:7-10

And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. ⁸ Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. ⁹ And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore, most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. ¹⁰ Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Introduction

No one likes to talk about suffering. It is a reality of life that makes us uncomfortable, and it can lead us to a place of bitterness and anger. It is a sticking point of our Christian faith, one that the unbeliever likes to point to as their reason for unbelief, while the believer has a difficult time defending his or her belief in light of it. How are we to approach this most troublesome of topics?

In the 1980's, the rock group Poison wrote a song entitled, "Every Rose Has Its Thorn". The lead singer of the band, Bret Michaels, wrote the song when he discovered that his girlfriend was cheating on him. The chorus goes like this:

"Every rose has its thorn
Just like every night has its dawn
Just like every cowboy sings his sad, sad song
Every rose has its thorn
Yeah it does."

The premise of this song, and the proverb it espouses, is that behind everything beautiful, there is still suffering. I will point out to you today that God's Word promises that behind every season of suffering, there is something beautiful. There is divine purpose behind the pain!

There are several points we can take away from Paul's "thorn" to help us in our understanding of how to deal with this problematic principle of suffering:

- God is sovereign.
- God listens to our prayers but will always act according to His glory and our ultimate good.
- God's power is magnified through our suffering.
- A testimony of God's work in your life that comes from a place of suffering is powerful.

- Take Away 1 – God is sovereign.

- *And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. (2 Corinthians 12:7) A literal translation from the Greek could read: "I was gifted an accusing angel that violently mistreated me so that it felt like a sharp spike in my body."*
 - Satan is on a short leash and cannot touch you without it being a part of God's divine plan. He could not touch Job without God's permission.
 - Job 1:9-12 - ⁹ So Satan answered the Lord and said, "Does Job fear God for nothing? ¹⁰ Have You not made a hedge around him, around his household, and around all that he has on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. ¹¹ But now, stretch out Your hand and touch all that he has, and he will surely curse You to Your face!" ¹² And the Lord said to Satan, "Behold, all that he has *is* in your power; only do not lay a hand on his *person*." So, Satan went out from the presence of the Lord.
 - God will use suffering to accomplish His purpose for your life.
 - He can use it to humble us.
 - 1 Peter 5:5a-6 - *Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for "God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble." Therefore, humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time.*
 - He used Paul's "thorn" to keep him from becoming conceited.
 - He can use it to discipline or correct the course of our lives.
 - Hebrews 12:6-8,11 - "My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be *discouraged when you are rebuked by Him*; ⁶ *For whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives.*" ⁷ *If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten?* ⁸ *But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons.* ¹¹ *Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.*
 - James 1:2-4 - *My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.* ⁴ *But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.*
 - Psalm 23:4 - *Yea, though I walk through the valley of the **shadow of death**, I will fear no evil; For You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.* The rod is meant for discipline, while the staff denotes support or guidance.
 - Israel was defeated or taken into captivity when they disobeyed.

- Romans 8:28 - *And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.*
- Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers and wrongfully imprisoned by Potiphar, but he saved his people and preserved the lineage from which Christ would come to save the world.
 - Genesis 45:5,7-8a - *But now, do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. And God sent me before you to preserve a posterity for you in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you who sent me here, but God.*
 - Genesis 50:20 - *But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive.*
- It was the blood of the martyrs, their suffering, that led to the spreading of the Gospel.
 - Acts 7:59-8:1,3-4 - *And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." ⁶⁰ Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not charge them with this sin." And when he had said this, he fell asleep. Now Saul was consenting to his death. At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison. Therefore, those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word.*
 - *The very empire that was persecuting the early Christians, the Romans, is the same one that created a transportation network of roadways, and safe passage on those roadways, that aided in the spread of the Gospel.*
- Jesus suffered so that we could be saved! He was prophesied as the "suffering servant."
 - Isaiah 53:3a - *He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.*
 - Isaiah 54:4-5 (NIV) - *Surely, he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. ⁵ But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.*
 - 2 Corinthians 5:21 (NIV) - *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

- Even Jesus prayed to not have to go through His trial, but that was not God’s plan.
 - Luke 22:42-44 - *“Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not My will, but Yours, be done.”* ⁴³ Then an angel appeared to Him from heaven, strengthening Him. ⁴⁴ And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.
 - Don’t assume the worst in people because suffering has occurred.
 - We are in a fallen world and suffering and evil will happen.
 - Luke 13:1-5 - *There were present at that season some who told Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. ² And Jesus answered and said to them, “Do you suppose that these Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered such things? ³ I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish. ⁴ Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse sinners than all other men who dwelt in Jerusalem? ⁵ I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish.”*
 - Navigating this life is like trying to have a picnic in the middle of a battlefield, and we wonder why mortar shells keep landing in our lunch.
- Take Away 3 – Christ’s power is magnified through our suffering.
 - *Therefore, most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. (2 Corinthians 12:9b)* Power – Greek: dynamis (dynamite) = miraculous power
 - In the midst of the storms of life God is with us.
 - Psalm 107:28-29 - *Then they cry out to the Lord in their trouble, and He brings them out of their distresses. ²⁹ He calms the storm, so that its waves are still.*
 - Psalm 34:4-7 - *I sought the Lord, and He heard me, and delivered me from all my fears. ⁵ They looked to Him and were radiant, and their faces were not ashamed. ⁶ This poor man cried out, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles. ⁷ The angel of the Lord encamps all around those who fear Him, and delivers them.*
 - Matthew 8:24-26 - *And suddenly a great tempest arose on the sea, so that the boat was covered with the waves. But He was asleep. ²⁵ Then His disciples came to Him and awoke Him, saying, “Lord, save us! We are perishing!” ²⁶ But He said to them, “Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?” Then He arose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm.*
 - Do you want to be like Jesus? Paul writes that His suffering for Jesus brings Him into closer fellowship with Him.

- Matthew 24:9,13-14 (NIV) - *Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me . . . but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved. ¹⁴ And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.*
- 2 Timothy 3:12 - *And all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.*
- 2 Timothy 4:2-5 - *Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. ³ For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; ⁴ and they will turn their ears away from the truth and be turned aside to fables. ⁵ But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.*
- As God promised the Jews that He would bring them out of Babylon and restore them, He promises us the same thing.
 - Jeremiah 29:11-14 - *For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. ¹² Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. ¹³ And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart. ¹⁴ I will be found by you, says the Lord, and I will bring you back from your captivity; I will gather you from all the nations and from all the places where I have driven you, says the Lord, and I will bring you to the place from which I cause you to be carried away captive.*
- Examples of those who have turned suffering into a life testimonial.
 - Nicholas James Vujicic is an Australian-American Christian evangelist and motivational speaker of Serbian descent. Vujicic has tetra-amelia syndrome, a disorder characterized by the absence of arms and legs. He has a wife and four children.
 - Joni Erickson Tada dove into a pond at 17 years of age and suffered a head injury that left her quadriplegic. She started Joni and Friends in 1979, an organization committed to reaching and serving people with disabilities with practical help and the saving love of Jesus.
 - Nate Saint and four other missionaries (Jim Elliot, Ed McCully, Peter Fleming and Roger Youderian) decided to attempt a face-to-face meeting with the Aucas (now called Waoranis)—a tribe known for their unprovoked killing sprees. After a few successful air drops to deliver gifts to this tribe, on January 8, 1956, they flew to an area near the Auca village and landed at Palm Beach. Despite some encouraging initial meetings, they were all martyred at that beach when the tribesmen attacked with spears a few days later. But evangelism to the Aucas did not stop because of this; in fact, it was

hastened. Wives and children of the missionaries returned to the area to live among the people, and many in the village came to accept Christ, including six of the killing party.

- Cornelia “Corrie” ten Boom was a Dutch watchmaker who, along with her family, harbored hundreds of Jews amid the Nazi Holocaust to protect them from arrest during World War II. It’s believed their efforts saved nearly 800 lives. Eventually betrayed by a fellow Dutch citizen, the entire family was imprisoned. However, Corrie survived and started a worldwide ministry and traveled around the world as a public speaker.
- Just recently, Davy and Natalie Lloyd, a young missionary couple, serving the people of Haiti, were kidnapped, and killed by a one of the many gangs that terrorize the area after they were leaving a youth event. What will their legacy be?
- What will your season of suffering bring?
 - The account of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead:
 - John 11:21-27, 32-35 - *Now Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. ²² But even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You.” ²³ Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” ²⁴ Martha said to Him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.” ²⁵ Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. ²⁶ And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?” ²⁷ She said to Him, “Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.” Then, when Mary came where Jesus was, and saw Him, she fell down at His feet, saying to Him, “Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died.” ³³ Therefore, when Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her weeping, He groaned in the spirit and was troubled. ³⁴ And He said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to Him, “Lord, come and see.” ³⁵ Jesus wept.*
 - Did Jesus weep because His friend had died, or because the others around Him had suffered loss and He was expressing empathy for them? Or did He weep because they just didn’t understand that, despite all the teachings, and all the miracles, the Healer was right in their midst, ready and willing to meet their deepest need, to give them relief from their spiritual suffering. He wants to do that for you!
 - Romans 3:23 - all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God
 - Romans 6:23 - For the wages of sin *is* death, but the gift of God *is* eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.
 - Romans 10:9-10 - If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

- Romans 8:1 - *There is* therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.
- We don't know exactly what Paul's thorn was. We can guess, but what we do know for sure is that it didn't leave him reeling. It had him leaning more on Jesus.
 - Philippians 4:6-7 - *Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; ⁷ and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.*
 - Note that the peace comes not from our prayers getting met, but from turning our cares over to Jesus.
- What does your season of suffering look like? Is it health-related? Did you lose a loved one? Has a relationship fallen apart? Are you dealing with temptation or addiction? Are struggling to make ends meet? Jesus wants you to give it to Him. Nothing left at the foot of the cross will go unredeemed. What will your testimony be? Will it be one of defeat, showcasing a powerless religion? Will it take you to, and leave you in, a place of bitterness? Or will your story be one of victory, showcasing the power of a Savior Who breaks the chains of sin and suffering and kicked death to the curb? The choice is yours.