

2 Corinthians: A Thorn in the Flesh

[2 Corinthians 12:1-10](#)

In this passage, Paul addresses the issue of suffering. Our innate response—especially in our culture—is to avoid suffering if at all possible. However, Paul explains that weakness keeps us in a position of dependence upon God. Not only does weakness allow us to experience God’s grace, it is also our connection to the greater world of glory that God is preparing us for.

Application

1. When Paul discusses his “thorn in the flesh,” he implies that it is a gift from God. This idea—that God purposefully causes his children to suffer—creates tension for us. Why? How can we view suffering in a way that honors God and advances the gospel?
2. According to Paul, pride is a greater threat to our souls than suffering. Why is this difficult for us to process and believe? Can you think of a time when God humbled you through suffering? How did that grow your faith?
3. Consider our response to suffering. God is sovereign over every aspect of our lives and has a purpose for suffering; however, like Jesus—we can and should plead for God’s mercy. What does this look like practically in our lives? How can these weaknesses actually produce freedom?
4. Sometimes we suffer *for* the gospel, and sometimes our suffering presents opportunities to *advance* the gospel. How is this so? How have you seen these truths play out through another’s suffering or in your own life?

Key Points

- Although Paul has true reasons to boast—experiencing an incredible vision of heaven—he chooses to boast in his weakness.
- In order to check Paul’s pride, God afflicts him with a thorn in the flesh. While this idea creates tension for us, the Scripture is clear that God values our humility over our personal comfort.
- God is not the author of evil, but God is sovereign over evil. We can take comfort in the truth that God grew a body in the person of Jesus and subjugated himself to a people whom he knew would reject and torture him.

- Although we cannot know God's purposes for our suffering, we can and should cry out for his mercy. In this way, we express our ultimate dependence on him.
- Weakness kills self-reliance. When we embrace our weakness, we can rest in God's grace, which is our connection to his glory. Indeed, our weakness keeps us connected to God and his sufficiency.
- Sometimes we suffer for the gospel, and sometimes our suffering presents opportunities to advance the gospel.

Other Scripture References

[Job 38](#)