

## STBC IMPACT Bible Study:

### **“I’D RATHER BE WEAK THAN STRONG”**

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**Our Opening Thoughts:** The world’s definition of strength and the kingdom of God’s definition of strength are two different things. In the world, strength is defined as having raw physical prowess, mental and intellectual dominance, “John Wayne-like” courage, bottomless financial resources, extensive social clout, and being afraid of nothing. In the world, **any sign of weakness** is something to be ashamed of—especially for men.

But in the kingdom, strength is found in weakness, humility, dependency, transparency, vulnerability, honesty, obedience, and intimacy with God. Strength is found when we yield to God and trust Him. Whereas being “weak” is a liability in the world (and among some Christians), it is an asset in the kingdom of God. Paul understood this dynamic well.

**Our Text:** **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. <sup>8</sup> Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. <sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> 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.*

#### **What was Paul’s Thorn? (2 Corinthians 12:7)**

When considering this familiar passage of scripture, a lot of debate has centered around determining what Paul’s thorn was. In actuality, no one knows for sure, but it could have been several things.

- Was Paul’s thorn spiritual? Yes (**2 Cor. 12:7**).
- Was Paul’s thorn physical? Possibly (**2 Cor. 12:7**).
- Was Paul’s thorn medical? Perhaps (**Gal. 4:15**).
- Was Paul’s thorn relational? Very likely (**Num. 33:55; 2 Cor. 6:11 – 13, 7:2, 10:1, 11:12 – 15**).

The only thing more important than determining what Paul’s thorn may have been, is to discover what Paul’s thorn **produced**. The thorn, which came from Satan (but was allowed by God), was used to bring about spiritual growth in Paul’s life. A thorn is something in your life that is extremely painful and long lasting. **A thorn comes at you from the outside in.** A thorn is something that pricks you, sticks you, irritates you, exacerbates you, and gets on your nerves. A thorn reveals how weak you are and how strong you aren’t. You think about it, talk about it, dream about it, cry about it, complain about it, and **pray** about it.

## **Our Points of Discussion:**

### **1) The Reason for A Thorn (2 Corinthians 12:7)**

- Humility
- Irony
- Liability

### **2) The Responses to the Thorn (2 Corinthians 12:8 – 9)**

- Paul's 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> responses
- God's only response
- Paul's new response

### **3) The Reward of A Thorn (2 Corinthians 12:9 – 10)**

- Intimacy
- Perspective
- Strength

**Our Closing Thoughts:** Being weak is a spiritual advantage for a believer. When God allows a thorn to enter our lives, whether it's spiritual, physical, or relational, it reminds us of how weak we are and how much we must depend upon God's grace. As with weakness, a "thorn in the flesh" is really a blessing in disguise! God wants us to discover how the power of grace is greater than the pain of a thorn. God wants us to see that weakness is a gateway to real power.

## **Our Discussion Questions**

1. Why is it hard sometimes to admit that you are weak?
2. Knowing that a thorn can be many different things, what is your thorn?
3. What do you think God wants you to learn from your thorn?
4. Can you see yourself ever being thankful for your thorn?
5. What will happen once your perspective changes?