



**ENCOUNTER**  
SUNDAY NIGHTS 6PM

Christianity &

**HUMAN**

**WHOLENESS**



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Exploring the questions of Life

**WEEK 7: HOW CAN I BE FREE?**

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*<sup>6</sup> Even if I should choose to boast, I would not be a fool, because I would be speaking the truth. But I refrain, so no one will think more of me than is warranted by what I do or say, <sup>7</sup> or because of these surpassingly great revelations. Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. <sup>8</sup> Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. <sup>9</sup> 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 about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. <sup>10</sup> That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong. **2 Corinthians 12: 6 – 10***

We interpret our theme, “Can I be free”, in light of the thorn that Paul speaks about in the passage. The sufferings of Paul teach us about problems, tribulations and trials that life can throw at us. The trials and sufferings have the potential to refine and prepare us for the glory of God, the glory that can be revealed through them.

## I. The nature of Paul's thorn.

The word ‘*thorn*’ refers to a sharp wooden stake that tortures or impales someone. We most probably all have experienced being pricked by a thorn and we know the piercing and the nagging pain it produces. No one knows with certainty the nature and magnitude of Paul's thorn. Some have suggested that it was malaria, epilepsy or some other physical affliction. Whatever it was, it made the task of preaching and ministering to the churches more difficult for Paul. Whatever afflicted Paul was part of God's plan for his life.

You and I may be going through a time like this right now. Even if you are not experiencing any affliction at the moment rest assured that there is a time for pain down your road. No one likes pain but it is part of the human experience.

Paul's thorn was in the flesh. It troubled his physical being. Very often the thorns we endure manifest themselves in the physical being – through sickness or other forms of physical suffering. At other times we endure emotional pain: depression, loneliness and heartbreak. Sometimes our thorns are spiritual in nature: we doubt our salvation and struggle with wholeness. Suffering comes in many forms. We hurt on many levels and the pain can be persistent. Paul's pain was continual such that he asked three times for relief but still the problem endured.

Some of the pain we endure may not be over in an hour or in a few days. It may be that for God's reasons, some of us are given thorns that will endure for years. Thereby, when a thorn comes into our life, let us not be discouraged.

God is doing something special in our life and in His time, God will make perfectly clear that which God is doing.

## **2. The purpose of Paul's thorn**

For Paul, the thorn came to keep him from excessive pride in himself. Given the ways in which God used Paul, there may have been a risk that Paul might try to take all the glory for himself. Therefore, God gave Paul this thorn in the flesh to control that flesh. In other words, the thorn was sent to keep him humble. Paul's affliction drove him to his knees. When the path of life is easy and smooth we forget how much we need the Lord. We become self-sufficient. When Paul hurt he began to seek the Lord in a new way.

Paul says, "*I was given a thorn in my flesh...*" (2 Corinthians 12: 7 NIVUK). Paul speaks of his thorn as a gift. There is a promise made in the verses to follow that is fulfilled during Paul's affliction and that is the promise of divine sufficiency. As Paul prayed for the thorn to be removed, God's answer was, "*My grace is sufficient for you...*" (2 Corinthians 12: 9 NIVUK).

Many a time we look into our situations and think if a certain problem could be solved then we could be more effective and productive. The problem with such a mentality is that it is wrapped up in self and what self can do. What God says to Paul is that God will give him grace to support and sustain him regardless of what he faces. God reminds Paul that God's plan will be accomplished through God's strength. In Paul's weakness, God's power and strength is displayed.

## **3. The reward in Paul's thorn**

Paul concludes the passage by reminding us that thorns are not in vain. There is benefit to be reaped from the pains we endure. Whatever it is that Paul endured it was not as a result of his foolish decisions but he was suffering for Jesus. How much of what we face is as a result of our bad choices?

Paul says, "*For when I am weak, then I am strong*" (2 Corinthians 12: 10). When the infirmities of life have Paul pressed beneath their weight then he is stronger than ever because the power of God is able to work in his life.

Paul uses the word "*gladly*" to indicate that the Lord has taught Paul the secret of rejoicing in the midst of difficulty.

May we come to a place where we see our trials from God's perspective and embrace them as such. If this is the stance we take then we are set free from seeing our situations as hard, harsh and difficult but that we understand them as being part of God's perfect plan for our life. When we get to that place then the Lord will work through us and our situation in ways we never imagined.

## **CHRISTIANITY AND HUMAN WHOLENESS**

19 June **“Can I be perfect?”**  
(Pete Grassow)

26 June **“Does God heal today?”**  
(Pete Grassow)

3 July **“How do I Forgive?”**  
(Similo Sanqela)

10 July **“How is my body ‘a temple of the Lord?’”**  
(Sam Bennett)

17 July **“What about Suicide & Depression?”**  
(Similo Sanqela)

24 July **“What are your addictions?”**  
(Pete Grassow)

31 July **“How can I be free?”**  
(Similo Sanqela)

7 Aug **“Do you need Healing?”**  
(Pete Grassow)

### **BMC YOUNG ADULTS**

ENCOUNTER (Sunday Nights)

Contact Stanford January on 011 463-2333

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