

Week of August 12-18

WHEN GOD SAYS NO

Scripture Reading: Read 2 Corinthians 12

The Bible is filled with amazing promises of God concerning prayer. Here are just a few of the many you will find:

- 1) **Matthew 7:7-8** – *Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.*
- 2) **Mark 11:24** – *Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.*
- 3) **John 14:13-14** – *And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.*
- 4) **John 15:7** – *If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.*

In light of these amazing promises, it would make sense, then, for Paul to cry out to God persistently and boldly for deliverance from his thorn in the flesh. Up to the time of God's answer, Paul probably viewed the thorn as a hindrance to ministry. Naturally, he would want the thorn to be removed. Who wouldn't?

God, however, had other plans; plans which included the thorn remaining in Paul's life. It was only after the fact, though, that Paul realized His purpose for the thorn. God had allowed it so that Paul would not become puffed up with pride over the heavenly visions the Lord had given him (12:7). The thorn, rather than being an impediment to God's will in Paul's life, was actually the means by which Christ's character would be developed in his life.

God's "No," though, did not mean that Paul was relegated to suffering alone with a thorn. Far from it! God promised something better than the thorn's removal, he promised Paul grace for the journey and God's glory for the destination: *"But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.'"*

In light of this word from the Lord, Paul was able to see God's plans and purposes for the thorn. As a result, he quickly shifted from prayer to praise in his response: *"Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. 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."*

Action Step: Have you ever prayed for God to deliver you from a trial or thorn and he said "No"? How did you respond? Were you upset, scared or confused? The next time God says "No," and you are asked to endure a thorn, follow Paul's example and give God thanks for what He will do in your life through the painful experience.

Prayer Focus: Ask the Lord to teach you how to lay hold of His all-sufficient grace as you endure your thorn so that His strength is made perfect in your weakness.

Take-a-way: *God's thorns always come with the flower of His grace.*