

When Woodrow Wilson was Governor of New Jersey, a very ambitious young civil servant called him at his home at 3:30 one morning. This young civil servant said urgently, "Mr. Governor, I'm sorry to wake you up, but your State Auditor has just died, and I would like to know if I can take his place."

Mr. Wilson thought that over for a moment and then replied dryly. "*Well, I guess it's all right with me, if it's all right with the undertaker.*" I wonder if the young civil servant got the joke. People with a puffed up sense of their own importance rarely do. It's difficult to put up with people with that kind of "I" trouble, isn't it? By "I" trouble I mean someone whose "I's" and "Me's" are too close together.

Contrast that with some people who are truly humble. Katherine Hepburn's was Hollywood royalty - a leading lady for 60 years. What did she put on the back of her autobiography? "*Katherine Hepburn is an actress. She is interested in tennis and gardening and lives in a small town in Connecticut. This is her first book.*" When you have Katherine Hepburn's credentials you don't have to boast.

Sometimes our inflated sense of importance, of self-sufficiency can really stand in our way. A psychologist once did an experiment in which he put eyeglasses on chickens. The glasses would cause the chickens to see a kernel of corn about a half inch to the left of where it really was. So when the chicken pecked at the corn, it tended to miss. The point of the experiment was to find out whether chickens are smart enough to adjust to their new glasses. He found that they aren't.

He goes on to suggest that, for humans, pride and ego are like those eyeglasses. And too many of us are like the chickens that can't learn to see straight by compensating for that distortion.

St. Paul was a man with great influence in the New Testament church - a man with a lofty intellect trained by Gamaliel, one of the most respected rabbis in history. Fourteen of the twenty-seven books in the New Testament have traditionally been attributed to Paul, and approximately half of the Acts of the Apostles deals with Paul's life and works.

It would have been easy for Paul to become arrogant and proud, to think of himself as being better than others, except for one thing in Paul's case: he had a decided weakness. He had something in his life which was a continual reminder to him of his humanity and his limitations. Paul called it his "**thorn in the flesh.**" We don't know what Paul's thorn was. Some have suggested that it was incessant temptation, while others have suggested chronic illness such as a serious problem with his eyes, epilepsy, migraine headaches or even a speech disability.

But here is the amazing thing. **Whatever this thorn was, Paul considered it to be a gift.** Think about that--a gift! It was a gift that would ensure that Paul would never forget who he was and who God is and would forever help him to remain humble. In Paul's estimation God gave him this thorn, a constant reminder of his weakness, that he might be continually reminded of his dependence on God.

Let me ask you, do you have "a thorn in your flesh?" Do you have a constant irritant that you may never be rid of? Maybe it's a physical disability. Maybe it is a disease.

Maybe it's a broken relationship. All of us have differing thorns. Is there any way you could embrace your thorn as a gift from God? It might take some practice. Sometimes it's a matter of learning to suspend judgement.

A poor farmer had one old horse to help him with his work. One day the horse escaped into the hills and when all the farmer's neighbors sympathized with the old man over his bad luck, the farmer replied, "*Bad luck? Good luck? Who knows?*" A week later the horse returned with a herd of wild horses from the hills and this time the neighbors congratulated the farmer on his good luck. His reply was, "*Good luck? Bad luck? Who knows?*"

Then, when the farmer's son was attempting to tame one of the wild horses, he fell off and broke his leg. Everyone thought this very bad luck. Not the farmer, whose only reaction was, "*Bad luck? Good luck? Who knows?*" Some weeks later the army marched into the village and conscripted every able-bodied youth they found there. When they saw the farmer's son with his broken leg they let him off. Now was that good luck? Bad luck? Who knows?

I don't believe God sends thorns into our lives but God is there as you seek to deal with that thorn, and God can use that thorn to bless your life and bless others, just as Paul's thorn served as a positive part of his life.

Paul writes, "*Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.'*" It is understandable that Paul would pray that God would take this thorn away. But Paul learned an important lesson during this time of prayer and petitioning.

You see, more than changing our circumstances, prayer is meant to change us. What are we learning from our various thorns? Paul undoubtedly prayed not only to be delivered from his thorn in the flesh, but also for the ability to learn and to grow because of his thorn.

“My grace is sufficient.” Accept that; believe that and the thorns won’t be so important anymore.