

The Discipline of Denial

by Denis Lyle

The Discipline of Denial is a sermon that explores the concept of God's denial and how it can be a means of teaching us to trust in His sovereignty and to reveal His purpose and provision for our lives.

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 12:9

Topics: "Prayer Answers", "Gods Sovereignty"

Description

Denis Lyle preaches on the Discipline of Denial, emphasizing how God's answers to prayer can be 'Yes', 'No', or 'Wait', with the least appreciated being God's denial of our petitions. Using Paul's experience of a thorn in the flesh, Lyle explores the purpose of God's denial and the spirit in which His children should embrace His dealings. Despite Paul's fervent prayers for the thorn to be removed, God's grace was sufficient for him, leading to a transformation from pain to a triumph song, showcasing the sufficiency of God's grace in weakness and difficulties.

Transcript

One of the most baffling and yet blessed experiences in the school of God is the Discipline of Denial. Someone has suggested that God answers prayer in three ways: Sometimes the Lord says "Yes", (1 Sam 1:12) sometimes He says, "No", (2 Cor 12:9) and sometimes He says, "Wait". (Jn 11:3) I think the least appreciated and the most misunderstood is God's denial of our petitions. In the passage before us we are given an example of this Discipline of Denial administered to one of God's children, an example that explains in part both the purpose of a Heavenly Father and the spirit in which His children should embrace His dealings.

Do you recall Paul's experience here About fourteen years prior to the time of writing this passage Paul was granted a never-to-be-forgotten spiritual experience. An experience so wonderful, so ecstatic, that he was not permitted to divulge all that saw and heard. God honoured Paul by granting him visions and revelations, and by taking him to heaven. The interesting thing is that Paul kept quiet about this experience for fourteen years. And during those years he was buffeted by "his thorn in the flesh", and perhaps people wondered why he had such a burdensome affliction.

The Judaizers may have adopted the views of Job's comforters and said, "This affliction is a punishment from God". (Actually, it was a gift from God) Some of Paul's good friends may have tried to encourage him by saying, "Cheer up, Paul. One day you'll be in heaven". Paul could have replied, "That's why I have this thorn I went to heaven". Or perhaps there were some in Paul's day as are there are in our day who believe

that an afflicted Christian is a disgrace to God. " If you are obeying the Lord and claiming all that you have in Christ", they say, "then you never will be sick".

I have never found that teaching in the Bible have you It's true that God promised the Jews special blessing and protection under the Old Covenant. (Deut 7:12) But He never promised the NT believers freedom from suffering and sickness. My, if Paul had access to "instant healing", because of his relationship to Christ, then why didn't he make use of it for himself and for others such as Epaphroditus (Phil 2:25) "Paul why don't you claim your healing as one of your redemption rights" What do you think Paul would have replied My, he would have said as he still says in this passage, "For this thing I... for thee". (12:8-9) I want us to look this... at The Discipline of Denial in that Paul experienced here.

There are three words that seem to open up Paul's experience in these verses. The first word is: (1) DIFFICULTY How often people must have said of Paul, "Oh, its easy for him, with his experience, his understanding, and his knowledge". How easy it is for us to think that great Christians have no problems, that those who appear to us to be spiritual giants have an easy time. They seem to know all the answers, their lives seem to display an easy mastery, their service for God bears a quality and an effectiveness that make our efforts seem poor and amateurish.

We sometimes look enviously at such lives and say, "Its all very well for him, for her". Now this passage shows us how wrong such an attitude could be for us, for here in the heart of this the greatest of all Christians there lay a problem that seemed to defy all solution, a pressure that to Paul was almost unbearable. For as we consider Paul's difficulty we notice: (a) A PRESSURE THAT SEEMED UNHELPFUL: He calls it "a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me". (12:7) Now we don't know what Paul's thorn in the flesh was.

Commentators differ as to whether this was a reference to something physical or something spiritual. Paul uses the words "the flesh", in either sense. The word translated "thorn", means "a sharp stake used for torturing or impaling someone." As to the nature of this thorn there have been many equally inconclusive guesses. Spiritual temptations: persecution: physical appearance: (10:10) epilepsy: migraine: malaria: eye trouble: (Gal 4:5) It conveys the painful idea of a stake on which Paul was impaled.

Whatever it was, it was something acutely painful. In its ORIGIN it seemed Satanic for Paul call's it "the messenger of Satan", (12:7) In its OBJECT it seemed to be a major hindrance in his life and ministry for Paul calls it "the messenger of Satan to buffet me". The word is a strong one. It means "to beat with the fists." This was the way the thorn was being used by Satan. It was used to afflict Paul. To buffet and batter him. Constantly, as he sought to serve Christ, he came face to face with his adversary, and moment by moment, and day by day, he encountered the piercing thorn, and after a day of grappling with it, he felt as though he had been beaten all over. (a) Do you know anything of this kind of situation Is there is your life the pressure of some sore trial Has your thinking through the past weeks been along this line... if only "If only the pain could be relieved, if only the health could be restored, if only my husband were keen, if only my congregation were more responsive, if only I had a different job, if only...

"Are you experiencing a pressure that seems unhelpful Perhaps its a physical weakness: a heart complaint: an unsympathetic home! Do you feel that its limiting and restricting your usefulness for God (a) The other aspect of this difficulty lay in: (b) A PRAYER THAT SEEMED UNHEARD: " For this thing I besought the Lord thrice that it might depart from me". (12:8) You see Paul felt the thorn must be dealt with and the only way to deal with it was to remove it altogether, so he went into the presence of the Lord

and cried, "Lord take it away". (12:8) Paul's prayer was DEFINITE: "I besought... might depart from me".

This thing was a hindrance and in the mind of Paul it had to go. Paul's prayer was FERVENT: "I besought". Literally, "I begged... "Paul agonised over the matter. Paul's prayer was REPEATED: " For this thing I besought... thrice... "He was prepared to ask, seek and knock. My, have you been praying earnestly about your trial Have you the same conviction as Paul about your thorn in the flesh that you would be better off without it It has simply go to end or your whole life as a believer will be spoiled, your testimony and usefulness for God will be ruined "Lord take it away".

Is that how you have and are praying Do you believe the only answer is that God must lift the pressure: remove that person: get you out of that situation and into another circumstance. Indeed you are so convinced that you've told God what He must do. Did you notice that Paul STARTED praying about this and then he STOPPED praying about this "I besought the Lord thrice". Then he did not pray about it anymore. The prayer ceased, but the pressure continued, and as far as we know the pressure of that thorn remained right to the end of road.

My, could it be that God wants you to stop asking Him to take out of your life something that He has no intention of removing Have we not been so busy telling the Lord what He ought to do about "the thorn", that we have never given Him a moment to speak to us about His Alternative. For the second word I want to talk to you about is: (2) DISCOVERY You see when Paul stopped talking, God started speaking and Paul discovered something about: (a) THE LORD'S GRACIOUS PURPOSE: For there was a purpose behind the thorn.

"Lest I should be exalted above measure". (12:7) Or as J.B. Philips translates it "to prevent my becoming absurdly conceited". Do you see the great danger that dogged the footsteps of this greatly gifted: greatly blessed: greatly used servant of Christ The danger was simply that of pride. "Lest I should be exalted". To Paul the incitement to pride was the number of the visions granted to him. My, is there a special area in your life that God knows to be in need of special care It may be that there is something lacking in your character, something lacking that could endanger your usefulness and witness.

But always behind the pressure and pain there's the purpose of a God of perfect love: perfect wisdom and perfect power. My, have you recognised the Divine Purpose in your thorn Has it been given to keep you lowly To drive you to the Throne of Grace To make you live in humble dependence on God (a) (b) THE LORD'S GLORIOUS PROVISION: " And He said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee." (12:9) It was as though the Lord was saying, "Paul I'm allowing the thorn to remain, but I want you to understand now that each moment there's ample provision for your need, for my love in action is sufficient for thee".

My, this was a message of grace. What is grace It's God's provision for our every need when we need it. "And He said unto me... " (1) Who The Lord: And that's His Personal Concern: The Risen Lord speaks directly to His tested servant revealing His tender concern. "And He... me". My, have there been times when some agony has wrung from your heart the cry, "Does Jesus care Why has this trouble come Why is this pressure not removed Why is my prayer not answered" " Does Jesus care when my heart is pained, Too deeply for mirth or song As the burdens press and the cares distress And the way grows weary and long.

Oh, yes He cares, I know He cares, His heart is touched with my grief, When the day are weary and the long nights dreary I know my Saviour cares." (b) What My Grace: And that's His Plentiful Supply: Do you see the humour of this situation "My grace... for the". The infinite exhaustless grace of God sufficient for

tiny little me. Its as though the might ocean would say to the little boy playing on the sands, "Little boy my oceans depths are sufficient to fill your bucket." Its as the though the vast cornfield would say to the solitary mouse, " Little one my great harvest is enough to feed you".

Have no fear, burdened believer. His grace is sufficient for you. His supply will match your need. Never too much, never too little, never too soon, never too late. Perfectly timed and perfectly adequate. Listen: Our God is the "God of all grace". (1 Pet 5:10) and His throne is "a throne of grace". (Heb 4:16) The Word of God is " The Word of His grace", (Acts 20:32) and the promise is that "He giveth more grace". (James 4:6) No matter how you look at it, God is adequate for every need you have.

Divine grace in all its Freshness: Fullness and Freeness is yours. (a) (b) (c) When Is: And thats His Present Resources: This was not a promise of grace for which Paul was to plead, but a bestowal of grace upon which Paul was to draw. God's grace is not only Adequate but Available for every time of need. Ill: When Webb Peploe one of the greatest Bible teachers of the early Keswick Convention was a young man one of his children died while the family was at the seaside. Returning from the funeral the stricken father knelt in his study and asked God to make His grace sufficient.

But no comfort came to his heart as the tears continued to flow. Even the Bible seemed to have no message for him. But after sometime he read again the text that hung over the mantelpiece and for the first time he noticed one word printed in large capitals. "My grace IS... "He cried, "Lord forgive me, I've been asking you to make your grace sufficient and all the time you've been saying, Webb, My grace is sufficient. I thank you for sufficient grace and I appropriate it now".

My, when the real emergency came sufficient grace was given to him to make him "more than conqueror." Are your circumstances such this... that you need His grace Have you been praying that God would take something out of your life That he would change your circumstances And the Lord is now telling you that this thing is going to remain: it is not going to be taken away, the pressure is going to stay. Are you ready to believe that God has made adequate provision for your need My, you may face situations beyond your reserves but never beyond God's resources.

For God's grace is sufficient for your need NOW. (1) (2) (3) DOXOLOGY For here the thorn pain is transformed into the triumph song. For in response to the Lord's instruction Paul replied, "Most gladly therefore... "(12:9-10) Paul had grasped the secret: infirmities: disabilities: weaknesses of all kinds... these are each but the occasion for the display of Christ's grace: strength and power. Although the bearer of this thorn Paul was able to rise above it and radiate God's grace and reflect God's strength.

You see Paul's: (a) ATTITUDE IS CHANGED: " Most gladly therefore will I rather glory". Or as AT puts it "I shall therefore prefer". What would Paul prefer What would he rather have We'll surely he's saying that he'd rather that this pressure and pain stayed. The world's philosophy is, "what can't be cured must be endured". But Paul radiantly testifies, "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities... " Why Because these things provided opportunities for Paul to prove afresh the sufficiency of God's grace.

I don't what the "thorn", is in your life this... That thorn that seems so desperate that you want to get rid of it, but could you, dare you, could I, dare I, look at the thing and say to the Lord, knowing that through it we would prove the sufficiency of His grace, "Lord I'd rather that it stayed". (a) And My, Paul's (b) ACCEPTANCE IS COMPLETE: For he says, "There was given to me a thorn... " (12:7) And the word "given", means "given as a favour". This thorn was a gift and this gift was from the Lord's hand ultimately. (Job 1:22) But a gift has to be accepted.

It is not enough for us to submit to these circumstances but to accept them. And Paul accepts this gladly because he has found that the gift is a gateway to an experience of Christ's sufficiency that could never be his any other way. "Most gladly therefore... "(12:9) " Accept it. From Thy hand, dear Lord I take This hurting thing, and bear it for Thy sake. Not bear it only, but in Thy dear name, Thy strength, Thy power, to love it Lord, I claim: To love it till from struggles, toil and tears, The likeness of Thy life in me appears.

Accept it. From Thy hand this thing I take, Lord, make it glorious for Thine own name's sake." THE Discipline of Denial. Are you experiencing it Have you been asking God to remove some pressure: some problem: from your life Asking Him to change the circumstances I wonder this... do you need to stop praying and start listening I wonder is the Lord now telling you that "your thorn", is going to remain The pressure is going to stay. But along with the Abiding Pressure there will come the Abundant Provision.

"My grace is sufficient for thee". Ill: Some years ago on arrival from China a missionary was asked to go and see an invalid. He was blind, lying upon a bed unable to turn in any direction, but his heart was full of the grace of service. For 29 years he lay like that fed only on liquid foods. For 22 years he was blind. Is it possible that such a one could do anything to help others Listen: 17 blind kids are supported by his efforts in India: 10 in China: a blind Bible woman in Korea and Jaffa: a blind boy in Sudan and Fiji.

Three hundred pounds per year is raised in answer to prayer by that faithful: sightless: silent: paralysed disciple in his little shut in room in Melbourne Australia. The secret So He giveth more grace as the burdens grow greater, He sendeth more strength as the labours increase To addeth affliction He addeth His mercy, To multiplied trials, His multiplied peace When we have exhausted our strength of endurance When our strength has failed ere the day is half done When we reach the end of our hoarded resources Our Fathers full giving is only begun, His love has no limit His grace has no measure His power no boundary know unto men, And out of His infinite riches in Jesus, He giveth and giveth and giveth again."

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