

Prayer—God Told Paul “No”

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BIG SANDY, Texas—On June 12, I started a seven-part series about prayer. Today is part four.

- Part 1—Talking to a Perfect Father
- Part 2—Faith and God’s Will
- Part 3—God Told Moses and David “No”
- Part 4—God Told Paul “No”

Thorn in the flesh

In this article, I will discuss a time when the Father said “no” to the apostle Paul. Paul asked the Lord to remove a “thorn in the flesh” from his life.

2 Corinthians 12:7-8—“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. Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me.”

Did you notice the purpose of Paul having the thorn in the flesh? The phrase “lest I should be exalted about measure” is mentioned twice in 2 Corinthians 12:7.

Shaping Paul’s behavior

Bible students recognize a different approach for God declining Paul’s request compared to the reason for Him declining the requests of Moses and David.

- Moses expressed anger and didn’t follow instructions.
- David committed adultery and covered up his sin with murder.

In this situation, the Lord was seeking to help Paul’s approach—so that Paul could continue to be a useful tool in the Lord’s hands. It is true that the Lord was seeking to shape Paul’s behavior. That’s what a loving Father would do.

Bearing with Paul’s folly

2 Corinthians 11:1-2—“Oh, that you would bear with me in a little folly—and indeed you do bear with me. For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.”

2 Corinthians 11:5-6—"For I consider that I am not at all inferior to the most eminent apostles. Even though I am untrained in speech, yet I am not in knowledge. But we have been thoroughly manifested among you in all things."

2 Corinthians 11:13—"For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ."

2 Corinthians 11:16—"I say again, let no one think me a fool. If otherwise, at least receive me as a fool, that I also may boast a little."

2 Corinthians 11:20—"For you put up with it if one brings you into bondage, if one devours you, if one takes from you, if one exalts himself, if one strikes you on the face."

2 Corinthians 11:22-23—"Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? So am I. Are they ministers of Christ?—I speak as a fool—I am more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often."

In *2 Corinthians 11:23-29*, Paul mentioned many ways he helped them. In *2 Corinthians 12:1-6*, he reminded them that he had received visions and revelations.

Answer and response

Notice the Lord's answer and Paul's response.

2 Corinthians 12:9—"And He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness . . .'"

2 Corinthians 12:9-10— ". . . Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 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."